

**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**Traveling America (VI)
Elvis Travelers, Chicken and Waffles in Hollywood, Catalina Island,
Disneyland, Golfing in Hawaii**

**Traveling America (VI): Elvis Lives, Hollywood Waffles,
Disney Land, Catalina, and Hawaii
Report One: Elvis Fans in Spokane**

August 8, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. We've had enough of my armchair reporting on Michael Vick's canine hobby and more than enough on America's Tinker Toy bridges (available in the *Culture and Customs in America* series). It is time once again to visit America's streets. For the next couple of weeks, your reporter calls on Southern California and the Hawaiian Islands. Yes, I know, but someone has to do it.

Addition of Personnel

For this report, I am pleased to announce a new member of the Your on the Street Reporter team. He is my brother, Tom Black, who will take-on the job title of Reporter Junior II. Tom worked for me some years ago---as my assistant lifeguard at the Lovington Country Club. As before, Tom's compensation for this job will be free access to a swimming venue. For this assignment, the Pacific Ocean.

Elvis Groupies

Waiting for my plane at the Spokane airport to meet-up with Tom, I queued-up at a concession stand to buy a newspaper. In front of me were two women:

- Woman, "Sorry, did we cut-in?"
- Reporter, "Not at all. Where are you headed?"
- Woman, "Memphis."
- Reporter, "Cool town. I had a great meal near Graceland a couple years ago."
- Woman, "Yeah?! That's where we're going, for Elvis' 30th anniversary."
- Reporter, "Anniversary?"
- Woman, "He died 30 years ago this month. We're making a trip to pay our respects."

I had encountered two die-hard Elvis Presley groupies. As I took a closer look at them, I noticed they were bedecked with things of Elvis. One was wearing a blouse with a picture of Elvis on it. Both carried purses sporting the King's face. They showed me their fingernails, which had "Elvis" painted on them. I did not have time to take a complete inventory of their Elvis artifacts, but their tattoos caught my eye (See Figure 1).

- Reporter, "Those are impressive tattoos."
- Woman, "Yeah, and we're going to get some more."
- Reporter, "Say, last I heard, certain colors in a tattoo can't be removed from the skin."
- Woman, "So?"
- Reporter, "Just wondering what happens if you get tired of Elvis?"
- Woman, "Ha! That'll never happen."
- Reporter, "I'm a big fan of Elvis...wrote a story about him. I stayed at the Heartbreak Hotel in Memphis."



Figure 1. Elvis lives...on legs.

That did it. My Elvis bona fides were certified. No one but avid Elvis fans would set foot in the place. We talked about Graceland, the Heartbreak Hotel, and which of Elvis' songs we liked best. They were gracious enough to let me take their full body shots, as seen in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Two of the king's fans.

- Reporter, "You are two cool women. You may find yourselves in one of my stories."
- Woman, "Fine with us. Wanna see Memphis?"
- Reporter, "My wife might wonder where I am. But if you have a couple minutes, let me show you a snapshot I made of Elvis' grave."
- Woman, "Sure," as I turned on my PC and showed them the photo in Figure 3.

It was fine way to begin *Traveling America (VI)*.

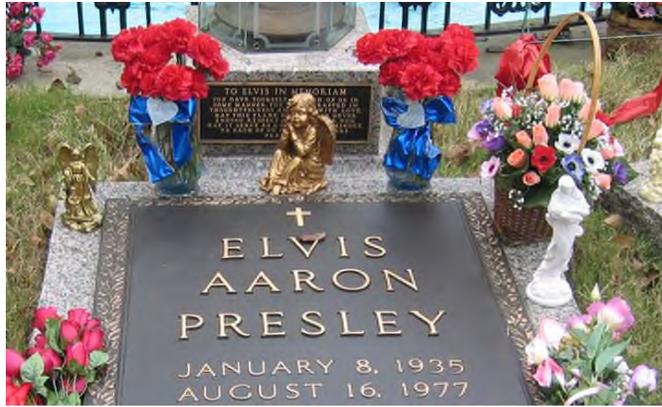


Figure 3. Elvis was last seen entering this place.

Traveling America (VI) **Report Two: Chicken and Waffles in Hollywood**

August 8, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter, reporting from Los Angeles and the Hawaiian Islands (with a short side trip to Catalina Island). For this report, we sampled a favored morsel of our friends south of the Mason Dixon Line, but cooked in trendy southern California.

Roscoe's Chicken'n Waffles

After picking-up brother Tom at the Los Angeles airport, we visited my son Tommy, who in addition to being Tom's nephew, is also his namesake. Tommy took us to one my favorite eateries in the area: Roscoe's Chicken'n Waffles. (At Pico and La Brea streets.)

It stretches the imagination, but the place serves fried chicken with waffles, accompanied by side orders of "greens," topped-off with macaroni and cheese. These delicious sensations were chased down with a special soft drink concocted by our waitress, who is named Mama.

Don't knock it if you haven't tried it. I don't mean Mama, I mean the food. The greens were the best I've tasted, and after hanging around the south for a while, I know my greens.

Roscoe's greens are a combination of collard and mustard greens, mixed-in with a fine (and secret) dressing. My recollection of eating greens is that of a pleasant after-taste of pork, so I asked Mama if her greens had bacon in them. She replied they were all vegetables. She said Roscoe's had to be careful not to put pork in their food because the clientele might object.

Good point. Anyway, I would wager that few people who are not from the south would admit they eat collard greens. Why? Because collard greens are stereotypically labeled as southern cooking, which has a certain stigma attached to it.

- If you ask a refined diner, "Do you like collard greens?"
- She would likely reply, "You must be kidding."
- If you ask a refined diner, "Do you like kale?"
- She would likely reply, "Of course, who doesn't?"

Collard is a kale folks. Call it what you wish. And try it with grits and fried okra. Very tasty. But if this scene makes you uneasy:

- Waitress, "Your order please?"
- You, "I'll have collards, grits, and fried okra."

Just make some name alterations:

- You, "I'll have kale, coarsely ground corn, and fried herb of the mallow family."

There you go. You're now an established yuppie, a refined diner, and in front of the good taste queue.

Roscoe's Mama was a big mama, and true to mamas, she instructed Tommy to, "Get your elbows off the table." Later, she told me to, "Get your elbows off the table." Still later, she

ordered all of us to remove our elbows from the table. As Mama was a *very big* mama, we complied.

Not only was the meal delicious, Mama could have assessed a cover charge for her entertainment, and we would have gladly ponied it up. We also had some laughs of our own:

- Brother Tom mentioned he had many photos of son Tommy when Tommy was a child.
- Reporter/Dad, "Tommy, I recall you looked a lot like your mom's side of the family. Do you remember Uncle Dick, your mom's brother?"
- Tommy, "No."
- Reporter/Dad, "Well, as a baby, you were a miniature Dick."
- Tom and Tommy, "Ha! Ha!"
- Perhaps you would have to have been there to appreciate the moment.

After finishing the meal and as we headed for the exit, Reporter Junior II asked Mama, who had been hugging the departing customers, "Mama, do you hug ugly white guys?" Which she did, including Tom and me. After my hug, she said she made no distinction about color, adding, "When the lights go out, everything is black anyway."

Cool Mama. If only everyone had your attitude. I asked, "Mama, do you know our last name?" Mama knew Tommy, as he is a regular customer, but she did not know his last name.

I said, "It's Black, and years ago, in my hippy days, I wore a pin on my shirt. It said, 'Black is beautiful.' I meant it to carry two messages, one about the Black family and one about the family of blacks."

Mama, "Sugar, that's sweet."

Stomachs full, we left Roscoe's with the Blacks feeling better about the blacks, and the blacks feeling better about the Blacks.

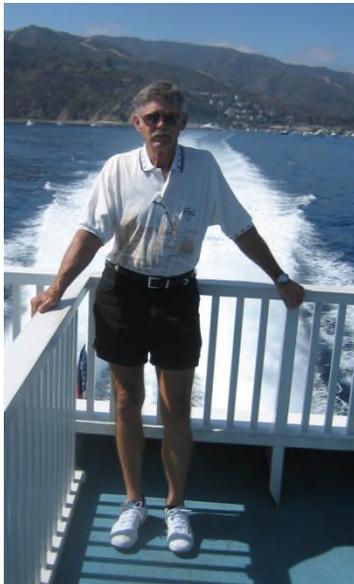
Traveling America (VI) Report Three: Catalina Island

August 9, 2007

I am on the streets of Los Angeles, and for the next couple days, the streets of Catalina Island as well. In a previous report, (available in the “America’s Cities” series) we recalled the words to the song, "Twenty-six Miles Across the Sea" and a bit about this fanciful island. This part of the report will provide you an update on Catalina, especially information on the fire that came close to torching the village of Avalon.

Reporter Junior II

Reporter Junior (my friend, Al) is out-of-pocket, currently milling-about in New Hampshire, gathering information for reports about the east coast. Consequently, as stated in the



first segment of this report, I've taken-on Reporter Junior II (brother Tom), seen in Figure 4 (with Catalina Island in the back ground). We are to do a lot of golfing in Hawaii, and Tom will attempt to straighten-out my slices and hooks. In his younger days, he was a scratch golfer. And even today, we plays well enough to occasionally “shoot his age.” No small feat, considering that he’s getting pretty long in the tooth.

I am told a controlled strike of a golf ball toward the right is called a fade...my uncontrolled slice. And a controlled strike toward the left is a draw...my uncontrolled hook. I am hoping Tom will provide hints on how to make my slice resemble a fade, and my hook resemble a draw. I am hoping his coaching will result in my golf shot become slightly more predictable than the results of a random number generator.

Figure 4. A new member of the reporting team

The Fire on Catalina Island

You may recall this island suffered a major fire earlier this year. My wife and I followed the news closely, as she and her family own a cottage in the village of Avalon. Tense moments, as the blaze came close to the town. But we did not realize how close. Tom and I took a motor tour of the area around Avalon, and discovered the fire was only one street away from reaching the residences. I snapped the photo in Figure 5. The golf cart sits on the street between the fire and homes. The green bushes in the foreground are the only remaining vegetation that escaped the fire on the uphill side of the street.



Figure 5. Fire near Avalon.

The Bubba Factor

Speaking of golf carts, Tom was impressed that the majority of vehicles on Catalina Island are golf carts. They supplant conventional cars, SUVs, trucks, and pickups because the streets are narrow and unable to accommodate larger vehicles. As a consequence of the restrictions on driving or owning large motor vehicles, the Bubba Factor on Catalina Island is low.

Oh yes, the Bubba Factor. I may have not defined this phenomenon in previous reports: The prevalence of a Bubba Factor is directly related to the number of oversized pickups seen cruising around a city---*all with empty, virgin pickup beds*. I have two buddies who live in Hayden, Idaho. They have huge Dodge pickups. On occasion, I check if the pickup beds show any use. Nope, they are as clean as a whistle. I give them grief about their Bubba Factor. They give me grief about owning Toyota SUVs. Anyway, take a look at Figure 6. No Bubbas here.



Figure 6. Many golf carts and very few Bubbas.

As I have suggested in a previous report, if you are in the LA area, take a boat to Catalina Island. It will be worth your time. While you are in Avalon, pay a call on *Anthony's Pizza*. There, you can play *26 Miles* and sample fine Italian food. My only suggestion is to avoid playing *26 Miles* repeatedly---as I did a few weeks ago. If you do, the waiters will cut-off your Chianti.

We return to LA tomorrow and visit another fanciful place, Disneyland.

Traveling America (VI) Report Four: Disneyland

August 10, 2007

As mentioned earlier, for this series of reports, I am traveling with Reporter Junior II (brother Tom). For this report, we find ourselves in Disneyland where we talk trash about Walt and Mickey.

Americana and Disneyland

Because Disneyland is an integral part of Americana, the *Traveling America* reports have been scheduled to pay a call on this place. I can now complete this part of our itinerary. I first visited Disneyland in 1960, and spent many days there while living in LA. I often accompanied my friends and relatives who traveled from New Mexico to see this remarkable place. I was a valuable commodity because I navigated the LA freeways that enabled my friends to find their way to this park.

In 1960, Disneyland was only five years old, but the surrounding countryside was already changing from acres-upon-acres of orange tree orchards to acres-upon-acres of hotels, parking lots, and fast food eateries. Today, I was astonished by the extent of the transmutation. Disneyland has taken over Anaheim and the surrounding cities and is making a ton of money selling its wholesome fantasies. The locals are rewarded by Disney's presence.

The orange farmers got a good deal by selling their acreage to Walt. Granted, the transaction resulted in a diminished orange industry in this part of the country. But they grow oranges in Florida.

However, Florida is bulldozing its orange groves and replacing them with Casa Grande Stucco-Style Condos. Who in the future will provide us oranges for our daily dose of vitamins? No need to worry. They will be crafted in the labs of Kraft Foods of the world---the industry that sells us a guacamole dip that contains (according to the label), "less than 2% avocado." What's the other 98%? You do not want to know.

All American

Disney cartoons, movies, parks, and the TV channel are well-known for their wholesome, pure themes. Almost all the Disney characters are fresh-faced, even many of the cartoon villains. They look a bit evil, but not entirely. Any reference to sexual subjects is off the table. The various animals that dance around the screen have so visible sex appendages. How do we know Bambi was a male? He eventually grows antlers. How did he and his loved ones have dear little deer? Through immaculate artiodactyl conception.

Orange County's economy is dependent on a huge industry built around asexual fantasies. Nonetheless, if Mickey Mouse is ever discovered in a sexual tryst with Daisy Duck; if Goofy is caught drinking Tequila and shouting Jewish slurs at the Seven Dwarfs; if Pinocchio is snagged at a DWI stop; or Tinker Bell is caught fooling around with Jiminy Cricket...well, the economy in this part of country can kiss Walt & Company good-bye.

America's icons must be as pure as the driven snow, as clean as Snow White and the Ivory Snow Girl. No human foibles allowed---especially for nonhuman stars. They are noble because they are not human.

Export Jobs. Import People.

Anyway, there are no factories in Anaheim, no assembly lines. They've gone south, courtesy of NAFTA, which, by the way, was supposed to have made Mexicans rich and inclined to stay at home working in their new factories. It did not work out that way, because the ten zillion Taco Bells around Anaheim need experienced personnel to cook the tacos for Disneyland's visitors.

Same situation with China. Our trade imbalance with this nation is not because Chinese makes Mattel toys more cheaply than we do. It is because they make them so they can be recalled and later resold to third-world countries that don't have toys for their children. Just kidding. Our trade problems with China stem from the fact that we've opened too many Panda Bear take-outs in this great Fast Food Nation. We need Chinese personnel to cook the Chinese noodles for America's citizens.

Déjà Vu All Over Again, Sort-of....

I was curious if Disneyland had changed over the past 47 years. I discovered it has changed very little. My walking through the exhibits and rides left me in a time warp. They seemed unaltered. Indeed, some of them seemed antiquated. An example of this art deco amusement park is seen in Figure 7. During my first visits to Disneyland, I recall looking at this futuristic space machine mock-up, which is located in Tomorrowland, and concluded it was a model for the future. Now, it resembles a model for the past. An old Jules Verne space machine of yesterdayland.



Figure 7. Tommorrowland is now yesterdayland.

Most parts of Disneyland are unaltered. The Matterhorn, the Castle, Main Street, the Jungle Ride, and the flower face of Minnie Mouse are the same as they once were. Figure 8 shows some of these artifacts.

For an old-timer, a person who frequented Disneyland many times many years ago, I am glad Disneyland has remained much as it was when it was first created. In a way, Disneyland is a time capsule of the mid-20th century. And jokes aside, Disney products have managed to maintain their theme of wholesome, non-vicious entertainment. I did a TV station search today,

surfing over a hundred channels to see what America's entertainment industry had to offer. Disney is an island of idyllic fantasy surrounded by an ocean of gratuitous violence.



Figure 8. Old scenes from old times.

Reporter Junior II informed me at least one thing had changed on Main Street. It no longer has a Hallmark card store. One summer, Tom worked for Hallmark Cards and spent a lot of time at the Disneyland Hallmark store. During our search for a segment of Tom's past, he asked if I knew the Hallmark Greeting Card motto.

-I started to reply, "Sure.'When you care enough to spend money on a very personal saying that you send to a loved person as if that saying came from you...when in fact, it came from a complete stranger, who writes personal, yet impersonal sayings for a living.' "
-But I answered instead, "Sure. ' When you care enough to send the very best.' "
-Reporter Junior II, "Yep."

Scores of Stores of Stuff

For certain, the hundreds of curio and knick-knack stores are still doing a booming business. I had forgotten how many of them there were. At least 20 stores surround a ride or exhibit, selling every imaginable impression of Disney characters and Americana: Hats, glasses, license plate holders, yo-yos, T-shirts, pencils, pens, cups, saucers, and condoms.

The condoms are especially fun, as they have a picture of Mickey's head on their tip. Dive in Mickey! OK, there were no condoms for sale. Disney is all about supposedly wholesome fun. I disagree. What's more wholesome than sex?

For that matter, what's more wholesome than Hallmark cards? Besides being wholesome, nothing could be more American than Hallmark. So where was the Hallmark store? Tom and I wondered why Walt had stopped peddling them. We concluded we had no idea, except for the possibility that many folks will no longer pony-up postage to send a greeting card.

I would not place any bets on the long-term viability of the U.S. Postal Service. The more we use the Internet for our correspondence, the fewer letters and cards we carry to the post office. Which forces the post office to raise the cost of stamps in order to compensate for the loss of business. Which forces more people to use the Internet, which requires another increase in the price of a stamp...and so on. It is a business model for failure.

Don't Miss Your Chance!

One more point before we wrap-up this segment. In keeping with tradition, Disneyland still provides entertainment to those who are milling-around Main Street. Old-timey bands play throughout the day and evening. One such band is seen in Figure 9, which played music from Disney movies. I noticed the drummers in the band were using sheet music, the same as the other members of the band. Looking more closely, I also noticed the score was pretty complex.

I'm a musical pygmy, but I cannot see how a drum player needs to follow such a complex score to rap out tat-tats on a drum. What is even more baffling is watching an orchestra perform and how its cymbal player follows the score as if he were playing the lead score to a symphony. Once, I attended a Tchaikovsky concert at the Kennedy Center. I was not a big fan of his music but came along with some of my well-read friends because they volunteered to accompany me to a Fats Domino gig the following evening.

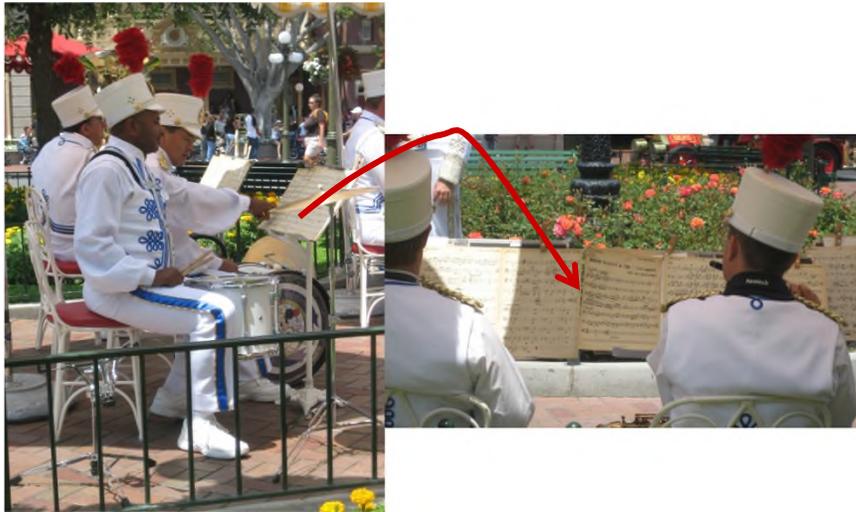


Figure 9. Be careful not to hit the wrong chord!

Fighting off aural fatigue, I turned my attention to the cymbal player. For most of the evening, he did nothing. Well, not entirely nothing because he read the musical score as if he were going to smack his cymbals together every second. Turns out, his only clash occurred at the end of the performance.

One could visualize an interview:

- Reporter, "Hello there. Nice performance. You have a nice touch with those cymbals."
- Cymbal player, "Thanks. My hard training paid off. I really nailed that clash this time."
- Reporter, "Sure did. Say, what was your major in college?"
- Cymbal player, "Music."
- "Hm. It seems you might have over-trained for your job."
- "Maybe, but I'm first backup on the bass drum. There's a lot more action there."

Seediness is Passé

In conclusion, Disneyland remains a clean, wholesome place to engage in clean, wholesome fantasies. Of course, what should one expect? Disneyland was created for children. If we want adult entertainment, we can hop-on a plane to Las Vegas.

Just one problem: Las Vegas is now an artificial collage of Disneyesque machinations. I recently traveled to Sin City, and will file a report shortly. For now, it was time for Tom and me to move on. We had a plane to catch for Hawaii.

Traveling America (VI) **Report Five: Hawaii. How it got its Name.**

August 12, 2007

Today, Reporter and Reporter Junior II touched-down on the Big Island of the Hawaiian Islands. We landed at the Kona Airport and made our way some 15 miles south to our living quarters for the week at the Kona Coast Resort. During this short trip, we stopped-off at some stores to stock-up for provisions to get us through the first day or so.

Tom had never been to this part of the world, but he told me he had studied Hawaii, and he knew the history and geology of the region. For this part of his indoctrination into this exotic land, we visited the results of globalization: Texacos, Wendys, Safeways, McDonalds, and assorted shopping centers dominated the landscape.

Where was the mystical and mythical Hawaii? Where were the tropical forests, cascading waterfalls, and fragrant flowers wrapped around undulating hula hips? Tom made the observation, "I could be back in Albuquerque and not know the difference."

I thought, *True, and if it were not night time, your view of fast food joints would be enhanced by acres-upon-acres of black lava rock, and not much else.* But I replied, "Yup, but things will look-up." Or so I hoped. They did, as we shall see shortly.

How About Some Poi?

What might two temporary bachelors---on a spree in Hawaii---favor for nourishment and libation? Papaya? Mango? Pineapple juice? Poi? The stuff of this island and the tropics? Nope, we stocked-up on dip, chips, rum, and vodka. Two males who knew how to shop for the essentials of life. And after all, rum is tropical stuff.

As each of us had a kitchen pass---so to speak---from our respective spouses, we felt obligated to execute the proper kitchen protocol. Thus, we purchased a supply of healthy bananas and healthy milk. From which we could make healthy Banana Smoothies, topped-off with rum and vodka.

Life is a compromise. Healthy and unhealthy intakes in the same gulp seemed like a fine concession for two oldies looking for a bit of escape from failing joints and malfunctioning arteries.

Even better, we did not concoct our own Banana Smoothies all the time. Next to our digs was a pool-side café and bar, which took care of us throughout the week. Now, to the streets of Hawaii...such as they are.

Why the Hawaiian Islands Were Originally Named After a Fast Food

Historians believe the Hawaiian Islands were uninhabited by humans until around 1,000 years ago. This theory makes sense. If you look at a map, you will see they are the most remote chain of islands on earth. Around 800 BC, Polynesians came to stay, and lived a fine life until the arrival of those spirited adventurers and renowned, courageous conquerors of Noble Savages, the English.

In 1778, Captain John Cook landed on these islands. By this time, the English were beginning to exhaust their inventory of exploitable Noble Savages. After all, England had succeeded in subjugating and conquering people in Europe, Africa, Asia, North America, South America, Australia, New Zealand, the Caribbean, Malaysia, Sarawak, New Guinea, and assorted

other places. At one time, England claimed ownership of almost 25 percent of Africa and over 50 percent of North America. Hawaii was brimming with Noble Savages, ripe for the plucking.

By the way, we know the original residents of these lands---including the Hawaiians---were not consulted about their induction into the British Empire. To add insult to the induction, Captain Cook named the Hawaiian Islands after a fast food. He dubbed them the Sandwich Islands! What could be more insulting? The Burger King Islands might have been worse. Or naming them the Taco Bell Islands could have stung the Hawaiians' pride. Nope, Cook had a friend, who was the Fourth Earl of Sandwich, and he wanted to honor this man.

For you history buffs, the name of the entire state is taken from the island of Hawaii. Another reason Captain Cook named the islands Sandwich is because no one knew what the Polynesian word *Hawaii* actually meant.¹ Later, as the Hawaiians began to understand the word *sandwich* was associated with non-poi stuff, they named the archipelago Hawaii. True, they themselves did not know what Hawaii actually meant. But they thought it beat the word *sandwich*. And after all, can you imagine Elvis belting out lyrics about "Blue Sandwich?"

Finally, we arrived at our digs for the week. Having recently survived LA and Disneyland, we were ready for some peace and quiet. It was late, so we bedded-down, eager to explore one of the most beautiful places on earth.

¹ At least, this is the claim from the *Microsoft Encarta* reference.

Traveling America (VI) Report Six: Hawaii, province of Japan.

August 13, 2007

I am on the streets of Hawaii, accompanied by brother Tom. Today, we received warnings from our friends and relatives about our perilous situation on the Big Island. First, they informed us a hurricane was headed our way. Second, we were told an earthquake had quaked on the east side of the island. Third, another large quake was about to tremble off the coast of Peru, with the potential of dispatching a tsunami surge across thousands of miles of water onto our third-floor balcony. Our reaction:

- Tom, "We could be in for a lot of bad weather this week."
- Me, "Yeah, let's set our priorities."
- Tom, "Can we get a tee time for this morning?"
- Me, "Good thinking. I'll make the call."

Tropical forests? Flowing volcanoes? Submarine tours of underwater fantasies? Beaches of unparalleled beauty? Para-sailing over azure blue waters? Hawaiian culture centers? Flower-laded hula hips? Scenic mountain views without equal? Priorities aligned, we headed for a golf course. For this writer, to once again spoil an otherwise good walk. For Tom, to do what he loves to do and is he ever good at it!

Who Really Owns Hawaii?

Our first 18 holes of golf were played at the Kona Country Club's Ocean Course. I will not bore you with our golfing lores and lies for the week, but will share with you some beautiful landscapes and a few anecdotes.

First, contrary to the fables in our history books, Americans do not own Hawaii. Sure, it is one of the states of the USA, but substantial parts of it are owned by the Japanese. Perhaps the Japanese are not the majority stockholders, but they control a sizeable stake in the islands.



Figure 10. Signs of the times.

Second, having just emerged from California, I've concluded the Mexicans don't own LA (not yet), but they have enough clout to insist their language be posted over most of the Southern California area. Same with the Japanese in Hawaii. Take a look at Figure 10. How do I know the red signs are in Japanese? I'm not a linguist but read on. Shortly, I'll explain my insight.

From the first tee to the eighteenth, I was happy to discover Tom appreciated the beauty of Hawaii. Last night's drive through McDonald'sville was history. In between my hooks and slices and Tom's draws and fades, we took time to take-in scenes that are difficult to find in

America. No question, Pebble Beach offers similar views on some of its holes. Our course offered majestic views on most of its holes---at about \$200 to \$400 less per 18-hole experience than at Pebble Beach. Figure 11 shows Tom at one of the holes and also a view from Kona Country Club's second course.



Figure 11. Golf with a view.

A few of my friends, those who think golf is more important than Banana Smoothies, tell me their principal golfing goal in life is to play Pebble Beach. It is a fabled piece of ground and grass. It's partly wind-swept. It's partly next to the ocean. Most of all, it's the stuff of legends. Tom Watson chipping in for a victory over Jack Nicklaus. Bill Murray demonstrating why he will never be invited to play at Augusta.

I am told the green fee for Pebble Beach is somewhere around \$500, plus \$100 or so for a caddy. Rounding these figures to \$600 translates to \$6 per stroke for the average golfer. For yours truly, who hits a lot of shots during a round, I would get a much better deal---certainly less than \$6 per miss-hit.

The green fees in Hawaii are not on a par with your local public course. The courses we played charge \$150 to \$300 for the privilege of spending four hours wondering why you are spending four hours playing golf.

Such is the game of golf, and we were so miserable we managed to play only six rounds of golf in seven days. The only reason we did not play seven rounds is because we felt obligated to take-in some of Hawaii's culture and (other) sights.

Thank You. Thank You. Thank You.

The courses we played were almost deserted because we were in Hawaii before the tourist season began. If you come to Hawaii to play golf, and you are on a budget, think about flying-over during August. Make sure you have early tee times, before Blue Hawaii becomes White-Hot Hawaii. A 7 AM starting time will take you though most of the course before it becomes too hot to play comfortably. Also, for tennis players, do not under any circumstances schedule to play other than in the early morning and later evening. I made the mistake of hitting with a club pro on three successive afternoons, and ended-up suffering dehydration on the third day.

During our first round of golf, we were overtaken by fast-playing players---two of the few golfers we encountered that day. We let this Japanese pair play-through on the 6th hole:

- Tom waved them forward, "Come 'on up."
- Golfer, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you."
- Tom, "My brother and I are playing a slow round. You're welcome to play through."
- Golfer, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you."
- Tom, "I'm kicking my little brother's butt!"
- Golfer, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you."

After they played-through:

- Reporter, "Tom, they didn't understand a word you said. They're Japanese."
- Reporter Junior II, "Ha. How do you know?"
- Reporter, "How do I know?! All they said was, 'Thank you.' "
- Reporter Junior II, "So? That's English. Besides, they might be Chinese."²

I considered schooling my big brother on some of the nuances of our Asian friends. One, most Chinese cannot afford to fly to Hawaii and play golf. At least not yet, but in a decade or so, those signs on the golf course in Figure 10 will also be in Chinese.

Later in the week, while I was warming-up on the driving range, Tom offered this story:

- Reporter Junior II, "Guess what? I had a 'Thank You' encounter a moment ago."
- Reporter, "Oh?"
- Reporter Junior II, "Yeah, a Japanese guy at the clubhouse kept trying to get into our golf cart. I kept telling him that he was in the wrong cart. But all he did was smile and say 'Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.' "
- Reporter, "How do you know he was Japanese?"
- Reporter Junior II, "Ha!"

Later, while showering in the clubhouse, we found ourselves the only white-skinned guys around. Still, golf is universal. It makes no difference if one is white, yellow, brown, black, or chartreuse, golf is the same the world over. Take golf jokes; they remain consistent in any language. The Japanese guys in the clubhouse offered one:

- Japanese Player One, "カ加 カカ加 カカ加?"
Translation³: "Say did you hear the one about the golfer whose partner was struck by lightning on the 12th hole?"
- Japanese Player Two, "加."
Translation, "Nope."
- Japanese Player One, "カカ加 カ加 カカ."
Translation, "He came up to the clubhouse, went into the proshop, and informed the head pro about the tragedy."
- "The pro said, "カ! 加! カカ加?" "
Translation, "Wow! Sorry! That must have been a difficult experience for you, eh?"

² I take note that Tom did not actually speak about the Chinese. I took a Mark Twain recess.

³ For the language pedants: These translations were made by a friend who does not speak Japanese.

- "The player answered, " ' **か力力 力力加!** "

Translation, "Sure was. Hit a shot. Drag Hiroshinto. Hit another shot. Drag Hiroshinto. I thought I'd never finish the round!"

A Good Walk...Unspoiled

A distinctive aspect of Hawaiian golf courses is the abundance of exotic wildlife and flowers. Tom and I spent almost as much time talking about creatures, critters, and the yellow hibiscus as we did about chips, pitches, and my occasional good shot. Pheasants. Turkey. peacocks. And other astoundingly beautiful birds. Flowers of every imaginable color. Lizards. Wild goats. Huge snails. On and on. When you come to Hawaii---even if you don't play golf---I hope you take time to walk around a golf course. It will give you hours of visual delight. I guarantee it will not be a good walk spoiled.

More shortly, on the golf links of Hawaii, its stunning mountains, valleys, and coastline...and Tom's confrontation with a Peacock who had adopted Tom's golf ball.

Traveling America (VI) Report Seven: Hawaii and Time-Share Salesmen

August 15, 2007

Today, Tom and I took in a time-share presentation and a helicopter ride over the north side of the Big Island of Hawaii.

Some of our readers may recall my reporting on time-share salesmen in Mazatlan, Mexico (See "Mazatlan, Mexico" 2005 on my website).⁴ Here is an update.

I'm Living in Time Shares Every Week of the Year!

I have shied away from purchasing time-shares because they have no owner's closet. I travel lightly and do not like to cart around swimming masks and Margarita glasses. I also like the idea of owning something tangible. Time-shares are not tangible. You own time, not a closet. To top it off, time-shares are impersonal. They are not much different from a hotel, as you are not allowed to hang family photos and dinner plates on the wall. Reporterette and I own only one time-share, that being in Hawaii.

One of the requirements for receiving discounts on time-share vacation activities, such as golf fees, is to book them through the recreation desk of the time-share resort. To avail yourself of this deal, you must attend a time-share presentation. During this event, you are hustled to buy more time-shares. From the viewpoint of a customer who has already purchased the product, the time-share company's requirement to attend another sales pitch before realizing the benefits of owning the time-share in the first place is a repugnant approach to marketing. It is not much more than coercive bribery, a façade for strong-arming the customer.

These productions are such a turn-off that I often pay the regular fees for my recreational activities. But for this occasion, I thought Tom should come into contact with time-share salesmen and share my misery, an expression of brotherly love.

In order to gain, say, golfing discounts, both partners in a marriage must be present to withstand the time-share assault. Tom and I are partners, brothers, friends for life, but obviously not a married couple. This situation presented a logistical and financial problem. Before we walked-up to the recreation desk, I prompted Tom that he was not married. Here's why:

- Reporter, "We'd like a tee time for two for tomorrow morning, around 7. Kona Coast Country Club. We'll sign up to attend the time share presentation for our discounts this week."
- Recreation desk attendant, "Yes, sir. Your wife with you?" (What could I say? Holly's name was on the time-share record in front of her.)
- Reporter, "No, but my *single* brother is."
(Tom was not single in the conjugal sense, because he had (and has) a wife. But he was single in the nonconjugal sense, because his wife was in far-away New Mexico.)
- Attendant, "Fine. I'll book a tee time and schedule you for our 9 AM Wednesday time-share update. Uyless, you attend as Tom's guest."

Cut to Wednesday. We made our way to the time-share gig, and in hindsight, I realize I should have tutored Tom that he was still single. Thus, we began our registrations, which

⁴ For the politically correct readers: I use the male gender as our sales person was a man.

required revealing our income levels, marital status, and our preferences toward assorted time share hedonisms.

The first time-share representative, the one who made the initial decision about how much time to try to sell us, enquired about our marital status. I told her I was married, and Tom was single. Tom rebelled:

- "I'm not single! I've been married for over....."

(Arrgh! Another thousand bucks down the drain this week for Tom's marital proclamation).

- Reporter, "Tom! I'm married. You're not!"

(I ask you, how bizarre was this situation? The time-share person, by virtue of being a time-share person, must have sensed something was amiss regarding our marriage profiles. After all, she owed her success to ferreting-out non-time share wannabees.)

- Time-share person, "Eh...Hmm. Both names of Black. You're married to...?"

(If she had looked more closely, she would have noticed we resembled each other. Which maybe she did. We are told that couples, as they grow older, tend to look like one another.

So, maybe she thought we were long-term partners-in-life.)

- Reporter, "Look. I'm married. Tom's not. That's why we're here. I'm Tom's guest for this presentation."

- Time-share person, "Okay. Come on in. There's your table. Enrique will be with you shortly."

My principal goal in attending a time-shares sales pitch is to let the salesman know I am not in the market for more time-shares. That way, I can leave early. I have tried, "You're wasting your time." Which did no good. I have tried, "I hate the entire concept of time-shares. Can I give my money back?" Which did no good.

After much introspection about how to defeat the process, I thought I had hit upon a sure fire winner. I would proclaim, "I own fifty-two weeks of time-shares. All I do is stay in time-shares. I cannot possibly absorb any more time share weeks." That way, I could get out of the presentation and still obtain my time-share recreational discounts.

- I informed Enrique (I am accurate about this dialogue, but I do paraphrase), "I own fifty-two weeks of time-shares. I can't possibly use any more."

- Enrique, "Wow! Impressive. But we have a program to make those weeks even more enjoyable. Our Elite program gives you a valet 24 hours a day. You can use your American Express credit card. You get a bathroom robe at any of our sites. You...."

- Reporter, "What does the valet do?"

- Enrique, "The valet arranges car rentals, cruises, and tours. All at your disposal."

- Reporter, "Sounds like a travel agent to me. I don't use American Express, and I don't wear bathroom robes."

- Enrique, "Guaranteed early check-in."

- Reporter, "I get that by calling from the airport."

- Enrique, "Guaranteed late check-out."

- Reporter, "I get that by not leaving my room until I'm good and ready. Look, I'll talk to my wife, and give you a call." I had finally thwarted him, or so I thought.

- Enrique, "Great, here's my cell phone number. I'm headed for Europe and need to wrap up some business, so can I expect to hear from you this afternoon? We can do this by mail."...And so on. Never leave a time-share leaf unturned. Then:

- "Tom, what is your annual income?"

The person never gave up! So, I talked about how Tom would use some of my 52 weeks of time-shares when I wanted a break from the rigors of the time-share life style. So, other than Enrique offering me a bathrobe upgrade, he was finally at a dead end.

For what it was worth, upon leaving the sales pitch, I felt terrific about our ploys. It must be a personal thing I have about time-shares. I bought. I made them some money. I only ask they give me the grace and dignity to enjoy what I purchased, without subjecting me to a never-ending sales barrage.

An Aerial View of the Big Island

We left the drudgery of time-share sales pitches and headed for a helicopter port. Here, we took a one-hour flight over the north end of Hawaii. Our route is shown in Figure 12. This was Tom's first ride in a helicopter, and I could not think of a better introduction than Hawaii's northeast mountains, cliffs, valleys, and shore lines. I will let Figure 13 take care of what would be inadequate words to describe the stunning beauty of this part of America.



Figure 12. Flight path.

Our pilot Jason was a fine guide and as guides should be, he knew his subject well. As an added bonus, he knew how to fly the helicopter. Through our headsets, we asked a lot of questions, and he had answers for all of them:



Figure 13. A picture says it all.⁵

- Reporter, "Say Jason, any large wildlife on this island?"
- Jason, "No. The isolation over the centuries kept large game away. We have some boar and small mammals, but the boar has pretty much been eliminated. It was wreaking the environment. We have lizards and bats, many birds, no snakes, no monkeys. This island has a lot of cattle, which is a big industry here. The Parker Ranch is on this island...over 200,000 acres. But they're fenced in."
- Reporter, "Tom and I encountered some goats on the golf course yesterday."
- Jason, "Yes, like the cattle, they're imports."
- Reporter Junior II, "This morning, my wife told me a mountain lion jumped through a jewelry store window in Santa Fe."
- Pilot and me, "What?!"
- Tom, "Yep. ...Your stories about wildlife reminded me of the incident."
- The three of us paused. Imagine. In the middle of a city, a lion jumps through a store window. What's this world coming to? Maybe the wild creatures on this fair earth have had it with us humans. Robbing a jewelry store is not a bad way to begin.

I've placed one more figure in the report. Figure 14 shows other scenes taken from our helicopter.

Before you head for the big island in the sky, make sure you take time for a side trip to the Big Island of Hawaii. And not just Hawaii. Oahu, Maui and the other islands will provide you equally wondrous experiences. And they all have golf courses, which is the subject of our next and last report for *Traveling America (VI)*.

⁵ From Blue Hawaiian Helo Tours.



Figure 14. More views.

Traveling America (VI) Report Eight: Hawaii and Golf

August 16, 2007

This segment wraps up the report on Hawaii. I hope my cogent analysis has satisfied your curiosity about this fine state, and you now have a better appreciation of poi---which I have not discussed and do not intend to, because I hate the stuff.

As mentioned, this last report is about golf on the Big Island of Hawaii. First, a brief introduction as to why I am attempting to play golf at an age when most men have learned the basics of the game, or have given up the game altogether.

In so many words, I was becoming a social outcast. My best buddies play golf. My brothers Tom and Ross love the game. I decided I would get into the mainstream of their avocation. In this way, I could participate in their golfing lies, and I would at last feel at home at the 19th hole.

I confess I take great pleasure in walking a golf course. In many situations, I am forced to use a cart because of the pace of play or the rules of the course. Still, cart or not, I am amazed by the beauty of many golf landscapes. Most of the time, they make my mis-hitting of balls seem insignificant.

As I said earlier, we played six rounds of golf in seven days. For those readers who are considering a golf trip to the Big Island, here is a rating from Tom and me about the courses we played (We played some courses more than once):

1. Kona Coast Country Club, Ocean Course
2. Big Island Country Club
3. Makalei Golf Club
4. Kona Coast Country Club, Mountain Course

None of these courses should be avoided. They all offer fantastic scenery. That's my criteria. Tom, who actually plays the game of golf, had additional thoughts about the nature of the greens and fairways, and such. But we agreed on this ranking.

These courses were not easy, in the sense of a local public course being easy. We both liked the Kona Coast Country Club Ocean Course because it was fair, challenging, and had fine views of the Pacific Ocean.

Challenge: Shoot Your Age

As I traipse around golf courses and talk with golfers, I often hear about someone shooting their age. Hmm. How can an 18-year old man shoot his age, which would require making 18 holes-in-one. How about a 100-year-old geezer shooting his age? Get real. A 56-year-old man who shoots a 56 breaks all sorts of records. Does the idea of shooting one's age compute with you? It does not make sense to me, except for those times when a golfer's age is somewhere between 60 and 90 years old. A 70-year-old man who scores a 70 on a challenging course has done something very special. So, when Horace says, "I shot my age." One should ask two questions, "How old are you, Horace?" And, "Any witnesses?"

I am happy to report Tom shot his age on the difficult Big Island Country Club course. He carded a 71. I am also happy to report his golfing partner played the entire first two holes without losing a ball. From my vantage point, a golfer must set his own goal if he is to enjoy this crazy game. Tom's goal is to make or break par. Mine is to preserve my inventory of golf balls.

Confrontation with a Peacock

At the Makalei Golf Club, we encountered a large variety of birds---at least Tom did. Along with several birdies, he even had an eagle. I confined my joy on the links to not losing my ball. Speaking of birds, this course featured turkeys, pheasants, and peacocks.⁶ The latter played a role in one of our holes. Tom hit his approach shot short of the green, where it came to rest next to a peacock, as seen in the left photo in figure 15.



Figure 15. Does a peacock constitute a movable obstruction?

It appeared the peacock had adopted Tom's ball as its own, or perhaps as its own egg. As you can see from the red arrow, the bird hovered over the ball, and displayed its plumage to impress my brother. The peahen to the right stood by, perhaps wondering why her male mate was seemingly taking over her nesting chores.

- Paraphrasing a golf rule: "Ball lying beside a movable obstruction. Remove the obstruction."
- As seen in the right photo, Tom did not remove the peacock, he removed his golf ball.

I have played golf with people who would have taken Tom to task for "disturbing" his golf ball, and not "disturbing" the peacock. I have played golf with people who insist on all players hitting errant balls out of rock-laden roughs, with the possibility of sustaining an injury and damaging a golf club. My opinion about these anal-retentive people? Get a life, including getting your priorities fixed.

I promised you I would not bore you with our golfing lies for the week. I played my usual inept game. Tom played his usual beautiful game. I gave him some tips on using a computer. He gave me some on using my clubs.

During *Traveling America (VI)*, Tom and I survived Los Angeles, Disneyland, Santa Catalina, as well as Hawaii's earthquakes, hurricanes, and tidal waves. On our last night in Hawaii, we settled-in on our balcony overlooking the Pacific Ocean (Figure 16). With Banana

⁶ A peacock is actually a member of the pheasant family. Our encounter was with an Asian peacock.

Rum Smoothies in hand, which smoothed our palates, we took in the sunset, which smoothed our souls.



Figure 16. A smoothie for the palate. A sunset for the soul.