

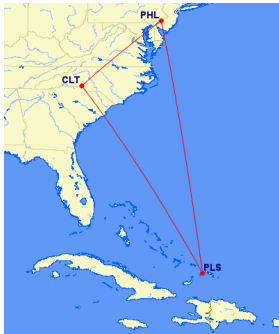
Two Well-traveled Weeks March 31 -April 13, 2024

This was not my original plan, but between the two of us, we ended up making four trips over a 14 day period. These included:

- Several days in the Turks & Caicos
- n quick trip to Denver
- An overnight trip to upstate NY
- Several days in Southwest Florida

TURKS & CAICOS: MAR 31 –APR 4, 2024

I did not plan to go here. I was looking at a beach inclusive on Jamaica, but when I finally tried to book it, the cost increased by \$400. That was an extra \$100 a night. So, I looked for another destination. I had recently found a page on the AA website that shows all flights [including connections] for every city that AA flies from. I faced several constraints:



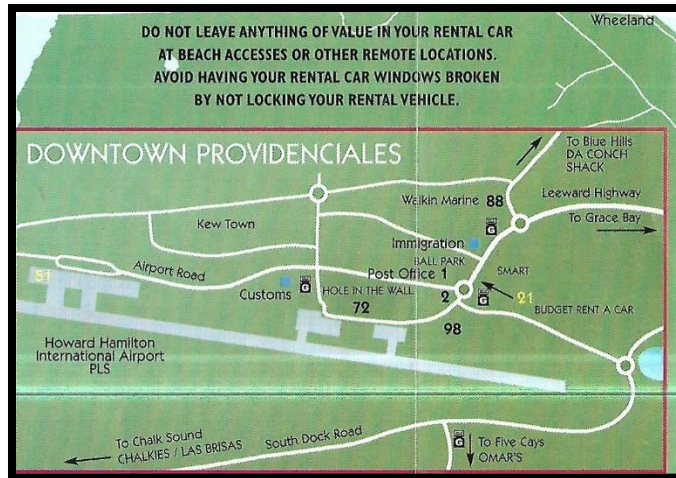
1. Reasonable airfares?
2. Flights at convenient times and of a reasonable duration?
3. Hotels available and at a reasonable cost?

It was EZ to find a destination that met one or two of the constraints. The hotels were an issue at most locations as this trip is during Easter week. I spent over two hours late one night looking at the flights/hotels till I came up with the Turk & Caicos Islands. I have never been there before though had certainly heard of them. Turks & Caicos [TCI] are a group of about 40 low-lying coral islands in the Atlantic Ocean [NOT the Caribbean Sea] that is a *British Overseas Territory*, southeast of the Bahamas and due east of Cuba. Oddly, its official currency is the USD! I was able to find acceptable flights - there via CLT and back on a nonstop flight to PHL for \$407 each. However, this is a “basic” fare meaning the loyalty points and award miles are less. Still, I’ll take it as other trips and spending will yield sufficient LPs to make status with AA for 2025. The beachy hotels there were all above my paygrade, but I did find a Best Western that is a 25 minute *walk* from the airport. It has a pool and shuttle to the beaches.

[EASTER] SUNDAY 3/31

Like most of our trips, this started with an early [555AM] train from Jenkintown. We had gone to the Easter Virgil Service at our church on Saturday evening. Parking is still free and with our SENIOR card, the ride to PHL is free as well. We had a 845AM flight to CLT and then a connection to Providenciales [PLS] that is the largest airport in TCI. Despite buying the basic fare, I was upgraded on the first flight. We arrived in CLT at 1021AM, which was 26 minutes early. While enroute to CLT, I received notification that we were both upgraded for the flight to PLS. Given the scheduled departure time of 106PM from CLT, I figured there would be a lunch service and confirmed this at the service counter where we got our new boarding passes. That

flight left on time and arrived 18 minutes early at 340PM. The terminal at PLS is not very big; there are no jetways and there were several planes parked on the tarmac from AA, SW, DAL, UAL and JB plus smaller planes from two local airlines. We had to walk around some construction in front of the terminal that was seemingly started and abandoned. Inside, we cleared immigration and got our checked bags. Outside was a long line for taxis. I asked



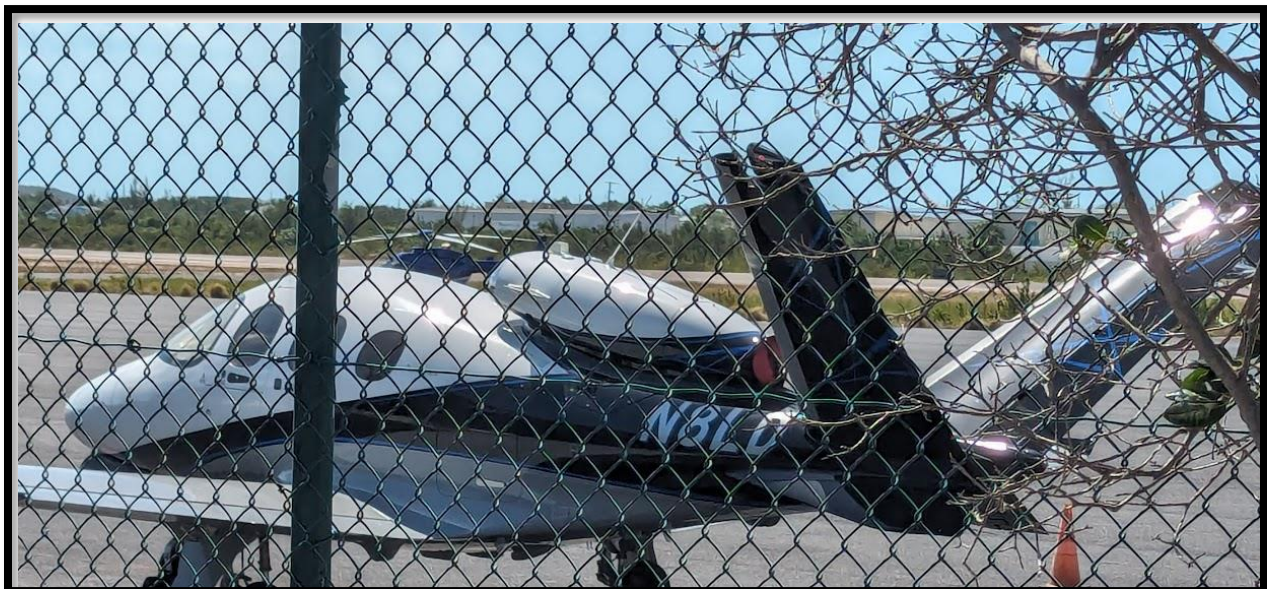
directions of the starter and she was surprised when I said we would walk. It took us about 30 minutes with a stop. We walked along the edge of the airport till we came to the BW Hotel on Old Airport Road by some buildings and parked planes [#72 on map]. I assume the buildings near there were the island's original terminal. Our hotel was two separate building with an office in between. FYI, TCI is supposedly the safest island with no major crimes. However, note the advice to leave your

rental car unlocked. We saw this in several places.

We checked in and were given a room next to a small pool. The room was fine. We changed and went for a swim and found the water to be a bit cool as the trees blocked the sun. Being closer to the equator, it seemed to get dark quicker. Eventually, we walked to the on-site restaurant for dinner. We were the only folks there and the menu had no prices. We both had grilled snapper and it was quite good though the bill was a bit of surprise. The dinners were \$30 each. With tax and tip, the bill came to \$77. It was more expensive than what I figured, but this turned out to be our cheapest dinner of the trip.

MONDAY 4/1

There was no free breakfast so I had brought some food with me. Carol continues to have her breakfast drink each AM. After eating, I walked to see what was near the hotel. I started by the



airport that was across the road where I saw this unusual private jet. I looked it up from the registration # [N8LD] and learned it is a very new Cirrus G2 Vision jet that is rated for a single pilot operation. From tracking data, I would think the owner lives in Utah.

A block away was a strip of local businesses I followed the road as it curved and came to a rotary [can see this on above map]. There were other businesses, the post office and a gas



station. I continued a bit and came to a shopping center with a SMART grocery store. I went in and bought some more breakfast food, snacks and several diet Cokes for Carol. It was about a 15 minute walk back to the hotel. While I was gone, Carol went for ice and discovered this much larger pool on the side of the building.

The hotel offered a free shuttle to **Grace Bay**, which is the major beach on the island. It left around noon and took about half hour. We drove on the main highway to the other side of the island. FYI, they drive British style on the left side of the road though the hotel shuttle [Dodge Mini Van] and most of the cars on the road there were from the US with the steering wheel on the left. There are no traffic lights there; just stop signs and rotaries. We were dropped at the **SALT MILL**, which was a shopping center built where there once was a salt mill. Historically harvesting salt from the ocean and growing cotton were the major economic activities on the island in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This was originally done with slaves and later other African workers from Bermuda and the Bahamas. TCI's current population of 60K is 87% descended from those workers.

It was a short walk to the beach between two resorts. We brought two beach chairs and towels with us [from home] and found a place to sit on the beach. The water was quite blue and the temp was fine. Just off shore were a constant parade of party boats and other water craft offering para-sailing and bouncy rides. These boats came to the beach to pick up and discharge folks. There were some touts on the beach who were hawking the various rides. Eventually, Carol walked to a refreshment stand on the beach and bought some drinks for us. We ate the snacks brought with us. We stayed at the beach till about 430PM and then walked back to the street to have dinner at **Danny Buoy Sport Bar**. I had mahi fish fingers that were local and VG while Carol had chicken fingers. Sorry, no food pixs as we left our phones at the hotel. The bill came to \$80.65 including the local tax and an additional 10% service charge, plus a \$3 tip that

supposedly went directly to the server. We walked back to the SALT MILL where we bought from more drinks at a convenience store and then I bought two donuts from **Turkberry** for the next day's breakfast. We waited for the shuttle that was supposed to come at 6PM. We waited and waited; it never came. We did not have a phone or even the hotel's phone #. Eventually, we walked over to the street and tried to hail a cab. To my surprise, I quickly learned that they were all cash only and the ride would cost about \$35. The hotel was about 9 miles away. We came to the beach with \$40 but had spent some leaving us with \$25. Luckily, one drive agreed to take us for the \$25. Back at the hotel, the man at the desk said he was not told to pick us up.

TUESDAY 4/2

This was our 2nd beach day. However, before leaving in the shuttle, I wrote a note and put it on the counter in the office saying to pick us up.



Once at the beach, we saw a dolphin swimming just offshore. Perhaps this was *Ja Ja*, a male dolphin that has lived in the Grace Bay for more than two decades. It is said he prefers humans to his own kind. The day was the same except we brought drinks with us. Some time after 4PM we packed up and walked back to the street with restaurants. We tried to go to a pizza place [rated best on island] but like some other places it did not open until 5PM. I saw a sign at the **Castaways Conch Bar** that drinks were 30% off so we ate there. The seating was open air in a grove of coconut trees. I had a hard lemonade while Carol had a strawberry daiquiri. I had the conch chowder which was good and some blackened shrimp while Carol had a naked burger that came with about ½ lb. of bacon. It was some much that she took several slices back to the hotel. Our bill came to \$92.38. I stopped at **Turkberry** for two more donuts and then we sat and waited for the shuttle van. It came a few minutes late and then drove back a different way. Inside was the driver and another hotel employee whom he dropped off enroute. I mentioned how expensive things were there – gas was almost \$7 a gallon. As we passed the local power plant, the driver said that electricity was almost 50¢ per kilowatt. Back at the hotel, I was on a zoom call for the NRHS for two hours.



WEDNESDAY 4/3

I was up at 8:30AM. After breakfast, we sat outside by the larger pool until it was time for the shuttle. Once at the SALT MILL, we bought more snacks and drinks in the convenience store. Carol also bought a cover-up shirt and went to have an ice cream. While she was doing this, I stopped by a real estate office that was promoting buying property in the TCI. There are no income, wealth or inheritance taxes. While there is a tax on meals, lodging and car rentals, there is no general sales tax. However, there are significant [as much as 10%] stamp and duty taxes on the purchase of property or importing a vehicle.

This was our last beach day and it was mostly the same. However, the water seemed calmer than the prior days. I had mentioned the water was very blue; there was a white sandy bottom and almost no vegetation or marine life. There were very few shells on the shoreline. We stayed till 4:15PM and headed back to the **Castaways** and sat at the same table and had the same server. No DRINK for me – I ordered the homemade lemonade but it was too sweet. I ordered more lemons with my meal and put them in the drink. I ordered a bread bowl of conch chowder. The chowder was fine but the bread was mediocre at best. There is no Panera on the island and in fact we did not see any US franchised restaurants at all. I also ordered fried rice with shrimp and this was a YUGE plate that could have fed three! Carol had the tilapia fish 'n chips. It was several \$ more if she had the local snapper. I got a takeaway box for most of the rice dish as well as Carol's fries. The bill this night came to \$104.

Back at the SALT MILL, I got more donuts while Carol bought more sodas including a Dr. Pepper for me. We waited for the shuttle and waited. By 6:20PM it had not come, so I was expecting a repeat of Monday. Carol had her phone to take pixs but it was in airplane mode to save the daily roaming cost. I asked a man waiting for something else to call the hotel; he was told the shuttle was running late. It came about 10 minutes later. The driver was the man who checked us in on Sunday and did not pick us up on Monday. He said something about the traffic. I started talking about the local history. He said he was from Jamaica [he looked different from the TCI locals] but was unaware that TCI was part of Jamaica until 1960 when Jamaica became independent and TCI retained its dependency status. Back at the hotel, I sat by the pool and watched YouTube videos until it was time for bed. The temp outside was perfect then.

THURSDAY - 4/4

This was our last day at TCI and our flight to PHL was scheduled at 3:16PM. I was up at 8:30AM and had the two donuts for breakfast. This time one had a caramel drizzle. I went outside to try and swim in the larger pool but it was just 3.5 to 4 ft deep. So, I just floated around for a while. Back at the room, I showered and got dressed. Carol had been packing up the suitcases. We had two – one had the beach towels, lotion and water shoes that we did not need. The beach chairs were folded up and covered with a large black trash bag that I secured with duct tape. I had a roll with me. The hotel had a free shuttle at 10AM to the airport and in light of the issue on Monday the clerk agreed to take us at 12:00PM at no charge. I used the time to write up part of this trip and at 11:30AM heated up the leftover from the night before for lunch. We checked out and there were no additional charges. I had booked the room thru AA hotels as it was offering

6500 loyalty points in addition to the 685 LPs earned from the actual purchase on my AA Aviator card.

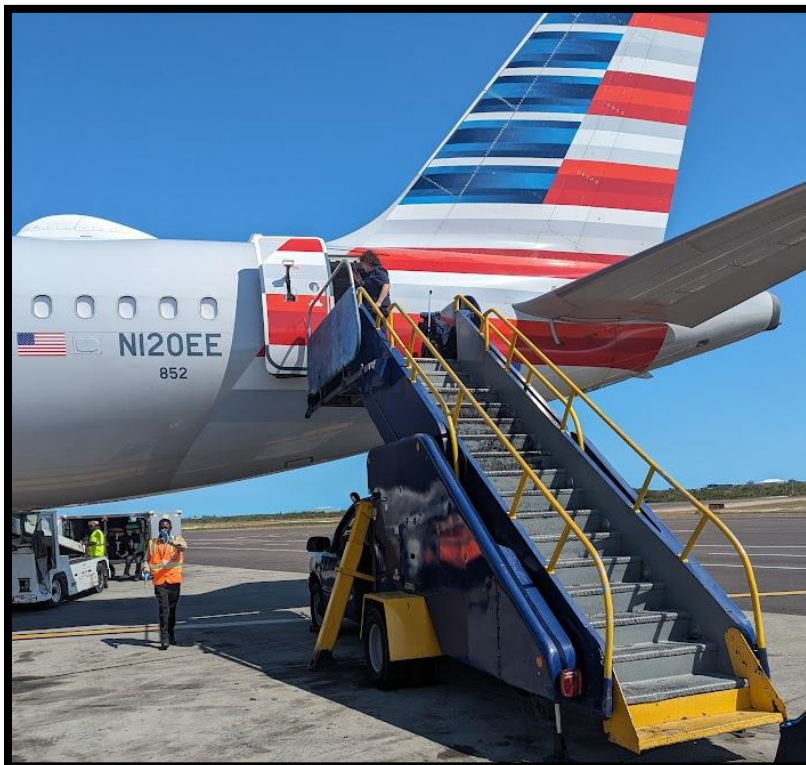
Two men from somewhere in Central America rode with us to the airport. They were going to Grace Bay but first needed to find an ATM because they came with British pounds instead of USD. We were at the airport in about 5 minutes. The check-in counters were open air. There were ones for the domestic flights to the other island and a combined one for all the international flights. There was a short line for AA's priority check in. The agent asked what was in the black bag – the beach chairs. Inside the airport were two long lines for security and it was repeatedly announced that there is no **TSA-Precheck** here even though it said that on our boarding passes. We eventually got thru and walked into a VERY crowded terminal



that reminded me of the former Continental [Distress] Express terminal in EWR or the AA one for RJ flights in DCA. Now I understand why the airport's website says do NOT arrive more than two hours early for your flight. This alone would stop me from ever coming back. There were constant announcements for the boarding flights – AA had three [JFK, CLT & MIA] plus there were others for UAL and SW. As each flight was closing, agents called out the names of missing passengers. For UAL's EWR flight, the agent kept saying NEW ARK like the one in Delaware and instead of NOO URK for the one in NJ. I feel sorry for the folks on the Air Canada flight to Montreal that was cancelled. I was bored so I went up to the 2nd floor and watched the planes. This plane was for our flight. Note the plane is being unloaded from both the front and rear doors. In front of the plane is the seemingly abandoned construction.



The incoming flight arrived about 15 minutes late and then once everyone was onboard, the pilot said there was a mechanical issue. Where would they get an A&P technician on TCI? I guess it was resolved as we eventually took off. **Flightaware** said we left at 457PM. I forgot to mention that PLS has just one runway that is 9199' long x 1148' wide and there are NO taxiways. We saw this before at the old airport in Eilat Israel. This means the once a plane has landed, it needs



to turn around on the runway and follow that to the terminal area. This includes the daily flight from London on British Airways with a 777-200 [albeit via Nassau Bahamas]. Our flight was full and we weren't upgraded. When I made the res, the plane was mostly full and we ended up in the rear exit row. However, since we are in Group 1, we were able to be the first ones at the rear door. Oddly, one of ground staff wrote down our name on a pad of paper before we climbed the stairs. Doing this, I had a clear view of the

plane's registration or tail # -N120EE . All US plane begin with N. Doing a Google search later with this #, I was able to see the history of the plane, an Airbus 321-231 that was assembled in Hamburg Germany in August 2014 and was delivered to AA a month later. When built, it had 16 first class and 165 coach seats. In November 2021, it was reconfigured to 20 first class and 170 coach seats meaning the coach rows are now closer together. UGH!

Back in Philly, we arrived at 804pm or 1.5 hours late. It took forever to get off from Row 24. We made a potty stop and I bought two slices of pizza to eat before we left the secure area. The only food in the baggage claim facility is a snack bar. Our bags came and we went outside to the ramp to the SEPTA station and caught the 840PM that had us in Jenkintown about an hour later. I make a WAWA stop on the way home to buy some snacks for the next day. Once in the house, I quickly packed a suitcase of my next overnight [really two] trip and used my PC for a few minutes and then went to bed.

Denver: April 5-7, 2024

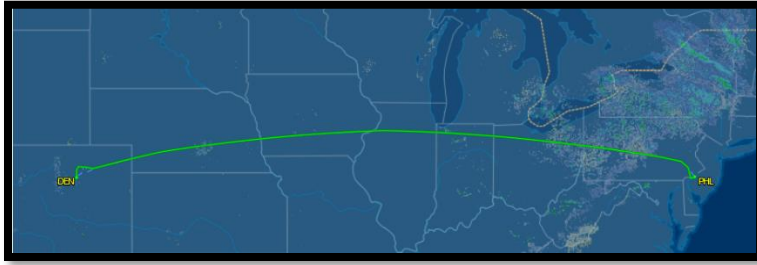
Back in early February, I was reviewing my folder that has flyers for upcoming trains shows with Carol. In it was the flyer for the **Rocky Mountain Train Show** on April 6-7. This show is one of the largest in the US. I went to it LYR while on a trip to CO/WY with Carol and the show was great. Given these dates were sandwiched between two other planned trips with Carol, I did not plan to go this year. However to my great surprise, Carol said you have millions of miles so why don't you just do another day trip and go. So, that is what I did.

On Feb. 7th, I booked the round trip flights [PHL -DEN] for 35,500 miles. I would arrive late on Friday 4/5 and then leave very late [1159PM] on 4/6, arriving at PHL on Sunday 4/7 around 9 AM. Thinking more about it, I decided to arrive much earlier on 4/5 so that I could ride on the commuter rail/light rail there. I canceled the res and switched to a flight at 1050AM scheduled to arrive @106PM with the same return flights. This cost 42K miles. I had looked at the ground transportation there back in February [no rental car on this trip] and when back from TCI on 4/4, I briefly reviewed at the Denver's RTD transit map so it would be fresh in my mine.

FRIDAY 4/5

For a reason that will be explained shortly, Carol drove me to SEPTA's Jenkintown train station so that I could catch the 755AM train to PHL. While enroute to the station, I realized that I left my snack food for the flight home and there was no time for another WAWA stop. Knowing I would have plenty of time at PHL, I planned to take the shuttle bus over to Terminal F and stop at the **Philly Pretzel Factory** there. In just over an hour, I got to PHL, checked my bag, cleared TSA and was on the shuttle bus. Unfortunately, the pretzel factory was closed that day because the oven was broken. I bought some snacks at another stand and headed back to my flight at B6. I was #6 for upgrade so had to be content with my usual exit seat [11F] on this A321. Surprisingly, the flight was only about 2/3rds full. The middle seat next to me was empty. The man sitting in the aisle in my row had paid to upgrade to that seat from a regular seat in the back of the [air]bus. He saw I was reading a model RR mag and started to talk with me. He lived in Doylestown and was also a HO modeler. He was flying to DEN to go camping with his son who

had recently relocated to there from PA. We took off to the SW 9 minutes early and turned to head across the Midwest.



When the inflight service started, a flight attendant reached over and said “Mr. Feeney, this is for you”. I was given a box with a fruit tray for free. Others on the flight would pay for this. The man said I guess that is because of your AA status. YUPE! There was cloud cover for much of the trip till we were over western NEBRASKA where I could see lots of crop circles. FYI, I regularly use google map while I am flying.

Eventually I arrived in DEN 17 minutes early.



The DEN airport has three parallel terminals that are connected to the landside by an underground people mover. American is in terminal C which is the furthest out.

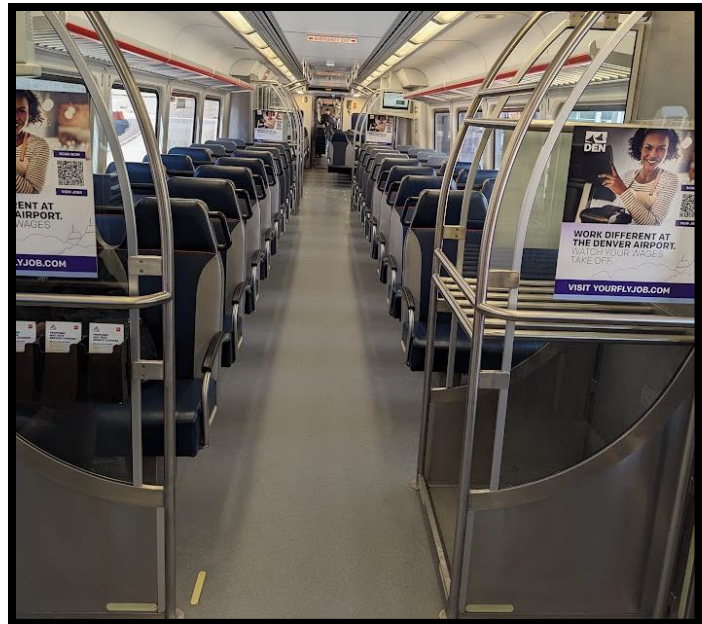
When I was in DEN last year, it was being remodeled and most of the work has been finished. DEN is now the 3rd largest airport in the US based on the # of passengers and it is YUGE – over 53 square miles. The man I met on the plane followed me to bag claim and then asked where he could get an UBER. He was going to Aurora; I told him he could get there by rail but wasn’t interested. After I got my suitcase, I went down to the RTD [Regional Transit District] station that is under the adjacent WESTON Hotel.



To some readers, the cars probably look familiar because they are essentially the same as SEPTA's Silverliner V cars. In fact, these cars were built in Philly by Hyundai Rotem and entered service in 2016 on RTD's A Line. This was RTD's first commuter rail operations; it has had light rail operations since 1994. The reason this line was built as commuter rail vs. light rail was that it needed to use the UPRR trackage to access Denver's **Union Station**. The ticket to Union Station from the airport regularly costs \$10, but I was able to buy an all day senior pass for \$2.70.

There are several differences between the SEPTA and RTD cars:

- The RTD cars are all high level while the SEPTA cars have traps.
- The RTD cars have luggage racks near the center doors that are different than SEPTA's doors.
- The RTD cars have 2-2 seating in the middle while SEPTA cars have 3-2 seats with some sideways seats.
- However, neither cars have bathrooms.



There are only six stops between DEN and Union Station to minimize the running time, which is about 37

minutes for the 24 miles. I existed at the next to the next to last stop [38th & Blake] because it is next to the UP yard and engine facility there. I walked over and took the elevator up onto the bridge across about eight tracks



From up there I had clear views in both directions. To the east I could see the **Rocky Mountaineer** train set that offers scenic trains across Colorado – more on this later.

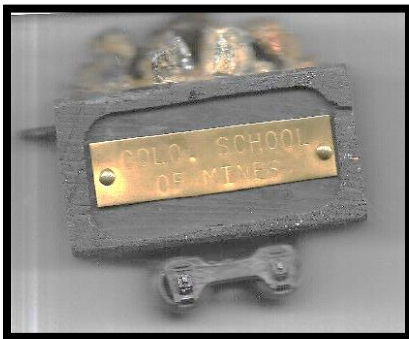


Eventually, I rode back down to ground level and walked over to the station. I boarded the next train that took me to Denver's classic **Union Station**, which has been repurposed as a luxury hotel. The lobby is currently being remodeled, but still serves as the waiting area for AMTRAK's *California Zephyr* that serves DENVER twice a day.



Leaving the hotel, I went down into the underground terminal there that handles local and long distance bus service plus a BRT route to Boulder. At the Info Counter, I obtained timetables for the two bus lines I planned to ride while in Denver and also found I could NOT buy a senior pass for Saturday [not sold in advance], nor could I buy one on a bus. I would need to use their APP. I had not really thought about what line to ride next. I came up to the surface at the light rail stop and saw a W Line light rail train to Golden was about to leave so I jumped onboard.

There was talk of building a rail line to Golden back in the 1970s. In the mid 1980s, RTD purchased the right-of-way formerly used [until 1950] by the **Denver and Intermountain Railroad** and later by the **Associated Railroad** that serviced the Federal Complex. Construction of the W Line began in 2007 and service began in 2013. The line twists and turns as it passes near Denver's sports stadiums and then twists and climbs up the Central Platte Valley Corridor.



Then the line makes a loop by the Federal Center, crosses several highways and end at the Jefferson County Government Center, about three miles from down town Golden. I had planned to just ride out and back but saw a free shuttle, called the **ORE**



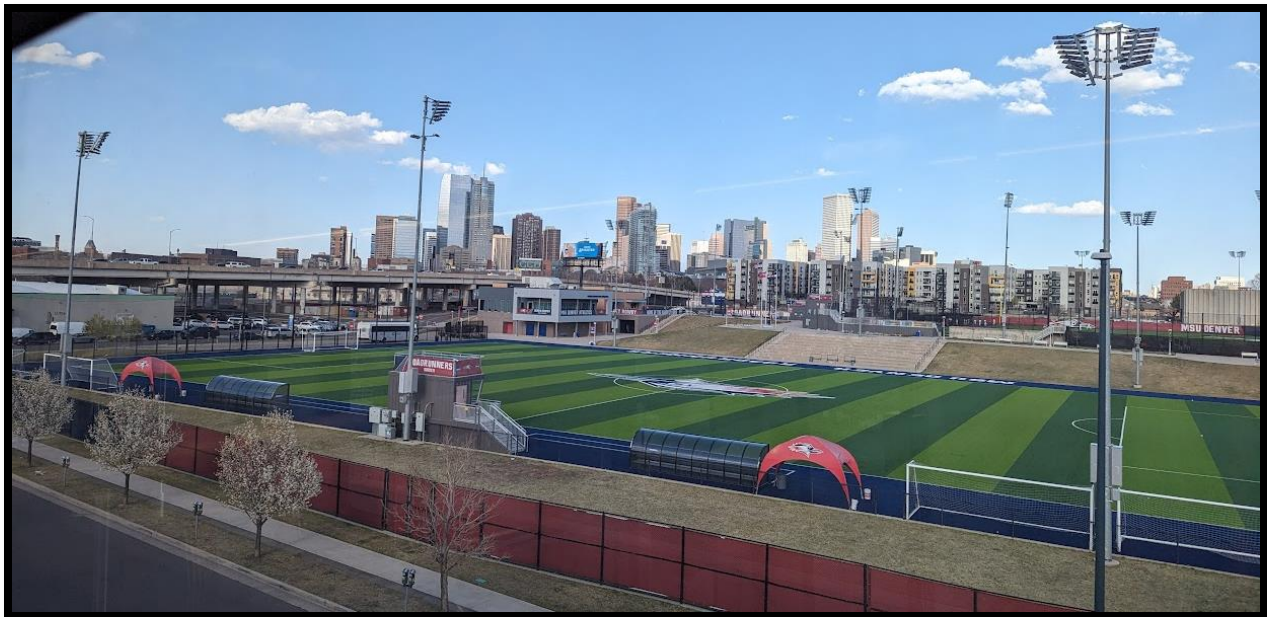
CART from the **Colorado School of Mines**. Ironically back at the Timonium MD train show in February, I had bought this HO scale model for \$2 that I sold for \$5 on eBay. I mentioned to the ore cart I had sold to shuttle driver who gave me the above magnet. The shuttle stopped in the middle of the CSM campus that has over 7,000 students and then dropped me off in downtown Golden.



I walked around for a bit and decided it was too early for dinner even with a two-hour time



change. To the west, there was still a bit of snow still left in the near by foothills. A half hour later, I was on the next shuttle back to the RTD station and boarded the 354PM light rail train back to Denver that arrived there at 435PM. Below is a view to the east of the downtown by the Metropolitan State University Stadium complex. Next to where the W line ends is the start of



the **16th Street Mall Shuttle**. This is free bus line that runs for some 18 blocks to the Civic Center Bus Station. However, because 16th street is being rebuilt, it was running on the parallel streets. I rode to 17th & California. I was heading to the **Appaloosa Grill** for dinner. I had found the place when searching the *AA Dining Rewards* website. I had what was essentially a Rocky Mountain cheese steak with a YUGE basket of fries. The food was fine till the bill came and there was a 20% automatic service charge and the server even asked for a tip on top of that. Later, I read a public review that said the place was employee-owned. I noted the 20% charge in my review. I walked back to the Mall shuttle bus expecting to ride to the Civic Center station and switch to another bus. However, I saw that other bus [#15] stop, so I boarded that. I rode it several blocks east on Colfax for my hotel for the night -a Days Inn.

Days Inn is owned by Wyndham and it and the related brands are generally pretty low on the hotel food chain. I would not stay at one of them if traveling with Carol, but they are usually at least ok for me. Besides, I had a \$100 coupon from our timeshare visit in San Antonio so the stay was most free. When I exited the bus, I could see this was not the best neighborhood. I had to walk a few blocks and actually walked past the hotel because there was no sign viewable from the sidewalk. Across the street were two theaters, both with shows later this evening. *MxPx* is



an American punk rock band from Bremerton, Washington. I passed on both shows. My room was ok but the halls were quite seedy. I watched some TV and fell asleep.

SATURDAY 4/6

I was up before 7AM The included breakfast was a total joke. I checked out and walked to the grubby looking 7-11 next door to buy a pastries for now and some snack food for later. I walked across the street and waited for the #15 bus. This was the view to the west showing the State Capitol and the Catholic Cathedral. I had downloaded the RDT app the night before and loaded \$2.75 into my *wallet*. While waiting for the bus, I bought my all day sr. pass for \$2.70 – oh well. I boarded the bus and rode to Broadway and





walked to the Civic Center bus station. I had to wait a bit till my next bus came. This bus would take me thru some of downtown and then head northeast and eventually take me within a block of the **National Western Complex** for the **Rocky Mountain Train Show**. FYI - the National Western Complex is the home of the **National Western Stock Show**, an annual livestock event and festival held every January, since 1906. This year the 15-day event drew over 700K folks. The bus gods were with me that AM as I arrived at 828AM, earlier than I planned. The show did not open till 9AM. Oddly, while the parking lot was full, only a few

folks were waiting inside. About 15 minutes later, the ticket window opened. I paid the \$14 admission [good for both days] with a card. I could have paid in advance on-line but there was an added “convenience fee”. *As some of you know. the only FEE I like is the first three letters of my last name.* By the time the show opened, the entry foyer was full. I talked briefly with a official of the show that is jointly sponsored by the local NMRA and TCA divisions.

Based on my experience last year, I immediately headed to the **Colorado Railroad Museum’s** booth. Over the years, my best buys had been at museums, like CRM, that are selling donate items. I quickly bought several HO kits and two cars. I put them in what was, to that point, largely empty suitcase and walked to the NMRA booth on the other end of the front row. There I saw *Cynthia Priest*, editor of the monthly *NMRA Magazine*. I have seen her previously this year at shows in Cocoa Beach FL and Springfield Mass. I left my bag under the NMRA table and hit the floor. The building had several sections. The first or front part was mostly manufacturers, the next part was dealers and then there were several sections of layouts. I covered the first three sections in detail but only saw some of the layouts.

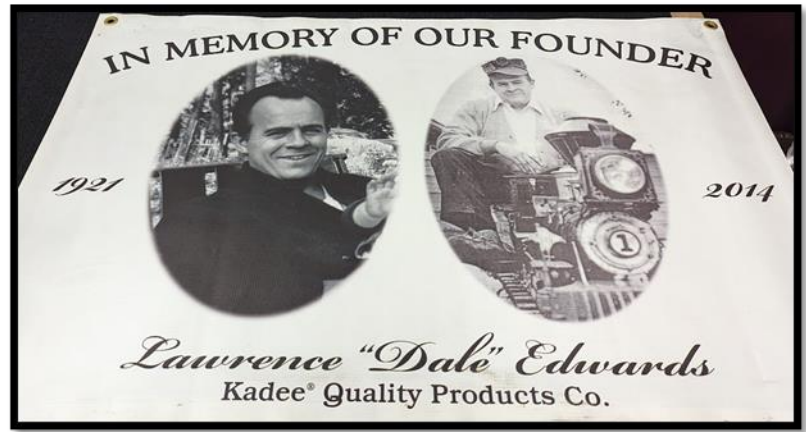


Across from the NMRA booth was **CLASSICONE**. The man in orange is *Stephen Priest*, Cynthia’s husband. At that booth, I finally got the decal sheet they’re selling for transformer loads that go on their unique recessed center flat cars. There are several YouTube videos of the RMTS. This one is a bit long but covers almost the whole show.

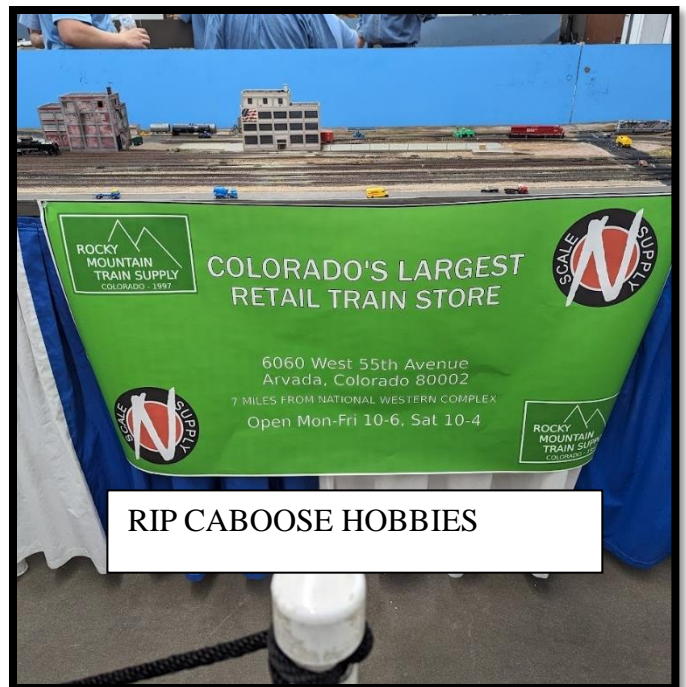
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wBvXe33O6ac>.

What follows on the next page are a sampling of my pictures of the show.





What about Keith Edwards - his twin brother & co-founder?



This FREE-MO modular layout was like the *Energizer Bunny* – it kept going and going.

I found the show very rewarding. At one booth, a widow was selling and literally giving away her deceased husband's RRiana collection. One booklet I paid \$2 for sold for \$25 on eBay. I made two stops at the **Moffat Road RR Museum** tables and made some great purchases. This was another repeat from LZR. After noon, I stopped in the Cafeteria in the rear of the building for a break. I wrote up what I have bought and got for free. I forgot to mention the show had a huge free table as you walked. I got over 20 RR historical society and similar publications for R & R – read and resell. Given I paid almost \$7 for a 20oz Dr. Pepper, I did not have a problem helping myself to the burger fixings bar for lunch plus ate the snack I brought with me. I looked at the modular layouts until 1PM when I attended an update on the **UP's Heritage Steam Operations** by Ed Dickens – its Sr. Mgr. I had heard him talk LZR. This year he went into great detail on how UP 4014 was not just restored but actually rebuilt so that it will run for decades to come. He also promised that before he retires, the Big Boy locomotive will run thru Moffat Tunnel.



I continued my walk thru the show and was very surprised to see this group of cars in Colorado.



Watching this layout will make your head spin.



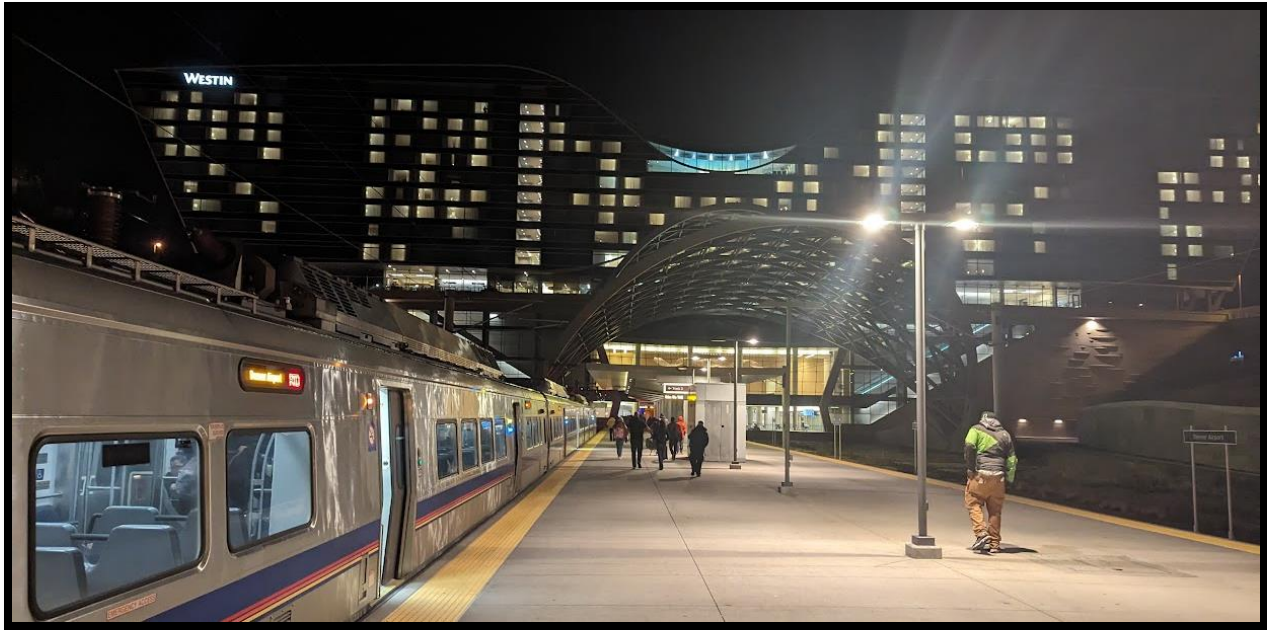
Eventually, it was time to leave. I had spent most of my cash and both the suitcase and my knapsack were full of stuff. It was windy as I walked back to the bus stop. My hat blew off 2x.

Luckily, I had found a church, about one mile to the east on the #48 route with a 5PM mass. The bus came about 445PM and about 10 minutes later I was at **Our Lady of Grace**. The priest looked at me strangely as I walked in wearing a RR shirt and hat plus carrying a bag and dragging a suitcase. So, I walked over and introduced myself. This parish is most Hispanic and



in fact the 5PM vigil mass was the only one in English. When the mass was over the priest asked everyone to sit while he made several announcements. To my surprise, he asked me to stand and introduce myself. The other dozen folks there clapped or waved to me. I thanked the priest as I walked outside and caught the #48 bus this time going in the other direction – back to Denver. It seemed more windy then when I left the show.

The #48 bus made a stop at the **48th & Brighton N Line** station and I originally planned to exit there and take the commuter train to Union Station. LYR, I rode this line to the show. However, looking at the route map for the #48 bus, I saw that it went very close to where I wanted to have dinner -**Bubba Gump Shrimp Co.** I have never eaten at one of these before and in fact I have never seen the complete *Forrest Gump* movie. As the bus drove down Brighton Blvd., I saw damage from the high winds; things were blown over and plastic sheeting had been ripped off several apartment buildings under construction. I got off at *Stop X* and walked a few blocks in the strong winds to the restaurant. There was a bit of a line but with my **Landry's Select Club** card, I was immediately seated. I had a big dinner of shrimp and chowdah and washed it down with three ice teas. Sorry no food pixs as my phone was charging after all the pixs at the show. The bill was \$45. When outside it was even more windy, so much so that the wind took away my breath. Eventually I go to a bus stop but I had to stand behind the pillar of a building else I would have been blown away. A large construction fence came sailing down the street and smashed into a pickup truck. The workers inside jumped out -startled by what had happened. I read later that the wind gusts hit 100 MPH that evening. Eventually, I got on a #15 and rode that



to Union Station where I transferred to the A Line and rode out to the airport. I checked my bag and then made a needless run around trying to find the TSA Precheck. Turns out it closed at



730PM. So instead of the metal detector, I had to go thru a new style body scanner, which I failed because of my knee brace. I had to go into a private room with two agents and drop trousers. They also went thru my bags and tested for explosion residue. After that unpleasant experience, I went down and took the people mover to terminal C. It was 9PM and my flight was not scheduled until

1159PM. I found an area with no folks and a hard surface. I took out my resale items, took their pix and listed them on eBay. I got four old ULRICH metal trucks for \$10. Eventually I went over to the gate for my flight to CLT. No upgrade but I had my normal exit row seat 11F. We took off @1213AM and I went to sleep almost immediately.

SUNDAY 4/7

I was awakened as we approaching CLT where we landed at 442AM -30 minutes early. This was one time I wish the plane had been late! In the terminal there were folks in the chairs and on the floor that clearly had spent the night in the airport. I got some food at DD but this airport location does NOT participate in the rewards program [DD in ORD does!]. My flight to PHL was in terminal D so I walked there and waited for my flight to PHL @747AM [that's a plane

time!] No upgrade as I was flying on miles and was well down on the list. We left a few minutes early and once again flew across the Chesapeake and Delaware Bays into South Jersey. We make a turn to the west and made the normal approach. Again, I had a nice view of BB62 *New Jersey* in the drydock and pointed it out to the teenager in the window seat in front of me. [When home I learned that there are tours of BB62 while in drydock. I can afford the \$225 donation, but don't think my knee would do well on the 75 steps down and then 75 steps back up.] We landed a bit late at 921AM. I got off as quick as I could and made a potty stop before heading to the parking garage. Normally I would have taken the train home but not today. Back on page eight, I said I would explain later why I didn't take the train to PHL for this trip. Carol came to pick me up from the cell phone lot and we quickly rode to our church in Jenkintown where my K of Council was holding a pancake breakfast, and as Grand Knight I needed to be there. We got there at 1030AM just as the 930AM mass [the most attended] was letting out. Carol and I worked the breakfast till about 1230PM. Once home, I took a quick shower and then we left to drive to Oneonta NY.

Why? We were heading to **upstate NY** to see the **total eclipse** on Monday April 8th. Originally, we planned to stay at one of Carol's sisters near Utica NY but that did not work out. All of the hotels in Utica, Rome and Syracuse NY were sold out and Carol found a **HI Express** in Oneonta while I was in Denver. Meeting us there were our son-in-law Ed and our granddaughter Emmet. Oneonta is a small city located on I-88; it has a SUNY campus and also Hartwich College. In terms of RRs, the D&H had a yard and what was once the world's largest roundhouse there. All of that is gone and the tracks now belong to Norfolk Southern. However, what remains is this caboose where on Sept. 23, 1883, a small group of local trainmen gathered to organize and lay



the foundation for the very first national union for rail workers. They dubbed it the **Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen**. [Image is from the web though I have been to it 2x previously]. We got there about 530PM and Ed & Emmet arrived about 45 minutes later. We went to a FIVE GUYS for dinner and called it an early night.

MONDAY 4/8

We were up early. After breakfast in the hotel, we headed in both cars to the park 'n ride lot next to Exit 31 of the NY Thruway in Westmoreland NY. Tis is near where Carol is from and her family still lives near bye. Ed left his car there and would drive back to CT later in the day. We headed north towards Adams NY and in doing so passed thru Rome, NY. When in Rome do as the Romans do, which meant a stop at the **Ferlos Bakery**. They have the best cake donuts. I bought a dozen as snacks for then and later. I also bought two rolls but they were mediocre.



From Rome, we had scenic drive on back roads. There were more than a few abandoned farms, but we did see some Amish and Menonite farmers. The housing stock was mostly very old with many having metal roofs. There were more than a few folks living in trailers some of which were surrounded by junk, dead cars and other squalor. The most



interesting thing we saw was where trees were being tapped for maple syrup. Plastic tubes were running from the various taps to this storage tank.

In planning for this trip, I saw that the band of totality would pass near Adams NY. I was familiar with the town as, on January 9, 1976, it was hit with a massive lake effect snow storm that dumped 68" of snow in a single day. Some of my colleagues at Peat Marwick, were driving back to Rochester from an audit in Watertown NY and got caught in the storm that closed I-81. One guy described that he just drove till the car would not go anymore. They were rescued by a snow plow that drove thru the blinding snow repeatedly hitting cars buried in the snow banks. This would also be the 2nd eclipse for us in six months. Back on Oct. 14, 2023, when we were in Albuquerque for the **Balloon Fiesta**, it experienced an annular eclipse and we were able to see a ring of fire as 1030AM MDT as the moon covered most of the sun. It got a bit grey but did not get dark. The eclipse this day would be different. It would be a total eclipse meaning there would be darkness and the next one will not occur in the continental US till Aug. 23, 2044!

We passed thru Adams looking for a place where we could park and have a clear view. We headed towards the edge of Lake Ontario. We came to Henderson Harbor where folks were standing, waiting for the event. Parking was limited and we saw signs saying \$20 to park. We headed further west to a state park but saw folks were already parking outside of the park and walking in. We back tracked a bit and parked on the side of the road and ironically we were



next to a solar farm. Unfortunately, it was cloudy that day so we did not have the best view when it started about 245PM. I had the special glasses but found it easier to just watch thru my phone. The pix to left was at 320PM and it was dark for a few minutes. By 330PM, it was all over and we left for the drive back to Westmoreland.



We stopped for gas and some snacks at the



Stewarts by the Thruway Exit. Ed left by himself as Emmet came home with us to Abington because on Tuesday we were taking her to Florida for her spring vacation. We stopped for dinner at a **Dickey BBQ** in Norwich NY [Emmet was born in Norwich CT] and were home by 10PM.

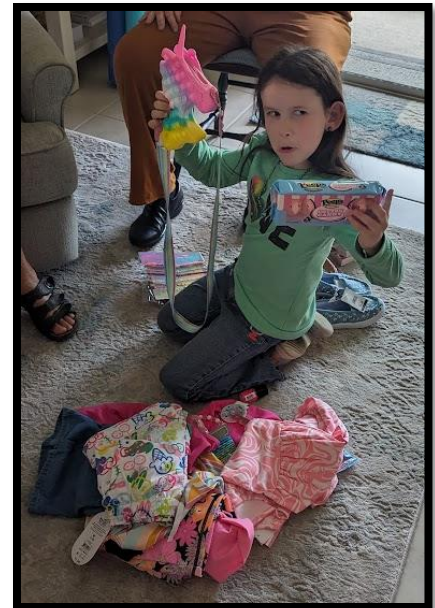
TUESDAY 4/9

For the last two years, we have taken Emmet to Florida on her Spring vacation. The first year Carol and I took her and last year I stayed home. For this trip, I used a expiring companion coupon that I get annually from my Barclay AA Aviator credit card. It allowed two other passengers to travel with me for a \$99 nominal airfare [plus taxes & fees]each. I had not done this before with Emmet and soon learned that I was not eligible to sit in an exit row, and Carol and I did not automatically show up on the upgrade list because we were flying with a kid.

We drove to SEPTA's Jenkintown train station and caught the 555AM airport train. The ride was fine, but somehow, I lost my Senior card on the trip. We checked our bags and had me added to the upgrade list but for naught. The plane was a 737-800; most of our flights from PHL are on an A 321. I had picked seats in Row 13 without checking with SEAT GURU and found my window seat did not have one. However, I managed and ended up sleeping for part of the flight. We were flying to Ft. Myers [RSW]. This city was very important to me in 1997 as it got me a temporary position at Gartner. In the late summer of that year, Gartner announced it was moving its accounting department from Stamford CT to there. One of the accounting managers suddenly quit in the middle of the yearend close. My friend Andrea Tarbox was the Asst. Controller and knew I was available and quite capable. I had left SCSU the prior May and had spent the summer writing a test bank for an accounting text book. I dove into what was a real mess. The woman who left really did not know what she was doing. I straighten out their intercompany accounting and was even nominated for an award that I could not accept because I was only a temp. Never-the-less, this became the start of my career at Gartner that lasted 13 years. I pretired from there in August 2010 so I could teach fulltime at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster PA.



My sister Kathy moved to Punta Gorta, FL three years ago and it is about 40 miles north of the airport. We arrived 16 minutes early at 1100AM. Kathy picked us up around 1130AM and we headed to her house, stopping for lunch at a



CULVER's that is next to a WAWA. We have been to both before. Once at her villa, Kathy had Easter Candy and lots of summer clothes for Emmet. Then we changed and went swimming at her club house. For dinner, I drove to Publix and came home with food, etc.

WEDNESDAY 4/10

Nothing special about this day. I didn't take any pictures. I often do that just to remember where I was or what things I/we did. We did go to the pool at the club house in Kathy's development two times that day. Not sure what we did for dinner.

THURSDAY 4/11



We drove about 45 minutes to the beach on Manasota Key. This was right on the Gulf and about 30 miles from Kathy's house. However, the weather was not good. There was a strong tide that was tearing away at the beach but Emmet wanted to go into the water. We did not bring bathing suits with us because of the weather. She took off some of her clothes and played at water's edge.

Eventually we made her come out. We left the beach and drove up the Key and returned to the mainland from the other end. On the way back, we passed the **Sunseeker Resort** in Charlotte



Harbor. We have watched this place being built since 2017. My Uncle Dan Feeney lived in Punta Gorda till he died a few years ago and we saw the resort while visiting him. It finally open late in 2023. It is owned by the company that owns the Allegiant Air that has its 5th largest destination at the near by Punta Gorda Airport. From PGD, there are low cost flights to over 50 destinations on Allegiant and also Sun Country. I looked at staying there one night with Carol, but its rates were well above my paygrade. Dinner was a decent pizza from *Brooklyn Joe's*.

We also passed the former train depot there. I have been there on prior visits but now the



building is closed for renovations till September. The depot was built in 1928 by the ATLANTIC COAST LINE [ACL] and had passenger service until the start of AMTRAK in 1971. Reflecting the culture when it was built, it had separate entrances for white and colored folks. Dinner was more food from Publix.

FRIDAY 4/12

We drove to Marco Island about 75 miles to the south to visit with my cousin John McGlinchey and his wife LuAnn. There was an accident and the drive took almost two hours. I actually have



several other relatives from my mother's [Liggan] side of my family that live in SW Florida.

Most of the drive was on I-75. The tracks of the **Seminole Gulf Railway**, the local short line that serves the area run right next to I-75 and also by the Punta Gorda depot. However, in all my visits to this area, I have never seen a train! When we visited with John and LuAnn LYR, they were living in a condo on the Gulf, but sold it and moved to a house on a canal. Also visiting was Ellen, John' oldest sister and her husband Joe.

As soon as we got there, Emmet changed and went for a swim and used their hot tub.



Later, we had a nice lunch. I had stopped at a local bakery and bought a cheesecake for dessert. We drove back later in the afternoon just as the evening traffic was starting near Ft. Myers. That night we went to **Celtic Ray Irish Pub** where we have eaten before. We were there too early for the nightly free entertainment.

SATURDAY 4/13



We went out for breakfast at **John Ski's House of Breakfast & Lunch**, where we have eaten before. This is a very popular place so we had to wait a bit for our table. The owner is a Polish guy originally from Michigan. The servings are YUGE. I had the seafood breakfast – shrimp, grouper finger and a crab cake. After eating, we headed to Ft Myers but made two stops enroute.

Our first stop was at the hooky **Shell Factory** on US-41. On Saturdays, it hosts a large flea market in its parking lot so we went there first. I actually was able to buy two HO trains and some other things at very good prices. The other bought some things as wells.



Walking to the actual Shell Factory building, we crossed a small pond full of turtles, an outdoor bar and several amusement rides that were not open. The actual store is YUGE; it has all kinds of seashells and things from them plus food, clothing, and gifts items. It has this sign but I would think that **Buckee's** are bigger. Emmet would be a small, tasty bite to this shark.



Leaving there, we drove a short distance to a **100% NMRA member model railroad club**. I had been here before when I attended an NMRA regional convention in Fort Myers years ago.



Kathy came in with me while Carol and Emmet stayed in the car. The HO layout has been



expanded since my last visit to include a western scene with some narrow gauge [Hon3] trackage. The yellow trees represent the aspen trees found in Colorado.

This a nice backdrop on the original layout.



From there, it was about a half hour to the RSW Airport , which is notable in two regards. First it is the *2nd busiest single runway airport* in the US. I would have guessed the Washington-Reagan [DCA] was the busiest single runway airport but it turns out to be San Diego [SAN].

Second, RSW is huge with over 21 sq miles; it is the 3rd largest in the US after DEN & DFW [I knew what was larger]. The airport is building a new terminal and will consolidate the three TSA lines to one so it can accommodate the increasing number of passengers it handles each year. Beginning later this year, *Breeze* will establish a base of operations there. This a new airline that began operations in 2021 and it's the fifth one started by David Neeleman, who previously founded *Morris Air*, *WestJet*, *JetBlue*, and *Azul Linhas Aerea*. Started. Looking across the field, I could see several MD-11 freighters that I later learned belong to *Western Global Airlines*, a cargo carrier based there. There are NO passenger versions of this three engined jet [derived from the DC-10] still flying just less than 100 freighters mostly with FEDEX and UPS. The USAF has flown the KC-10, tanker version, since 1982 and the last operating KC-10s will be retired later this year.

With a late big breakfast, we just had some snacks at the airport. I wasn't on the upgrade list again; I was added at the gate but for naught. Our flight was scheduled to leave at 435PM but left a few minutes early and arrived in PHL at 651PM, almost 20 minutes early. With checked bags, there was no way we would make the 710PM train so we just waited till the next one @810PM. We were at the Jenkintown station less than an hour later. We made a WAWA stop for a late dinner and were home about 930PM

Emmet's vacation was over and she needed to be back in CT for school on Monday. Given our late arrival that night, Carol was in no mood to undertake a five-hour drive on Sunday. We have over 150K AMTRAK miles so I looked for the best way for them to get there by train. It was like 13K miles for two from 30th Street, almost 9K from Trenton but only 4500 from NYP. So, early Sunday AM, I drove them to Trenton where they took NJT to NYP and then AMTRAK from there to Hartford. Carol came on Wednesday eve [4/17]. Colleen dropped her in Old Saybrook where she took AMTK using her points to 30th street in Philly and then SEPTA to Jenkintown where I picked her up.

Recapping the Miles, Points, etc.

As previously mentioned, the air travel was a mix of paid and award travel. For the flights to/from TCI, I only earned 1297 loyalty points/award miles because I booked the cheapest *BASIC* fare. That fare is comparable to those on low coast carriers such as Spirit, Frontier, etc. and with it on AA, picking seats, checking bags and preferred boarding are all extra. However, my *Executive Platinum* status still gets a preferred exit row seat, two checked bags and Group I boarding even with the Basic fare. The only disadvantage is that I earn half as many LPs/Award miles. For this trip, it was only 1297 LPs. I did better on the flights to/from RSW and earned 2783 LPs. Between both trips, I flew 4,755 miles putting me at 1,033,468 total miles. As said before, I will never hit the 2 million miles needed to earn a really significant award. Three meals using AA Dining got me 936 LPs and using AA Hotels for the stay in TCI got me 6800 LPs. As of 4/30/24, I have 1,939,453 award miles in my AA account including additional activity from the rest of April.

I didn't earn anything one night at the **Days Inn** in Denver because I am supposedly getting a \$100 refund. The room with tax cost \$119. I only have 2315 points in the Wyndham program. I

was forced to stay at two of their properties in IL last summer because there was no availability where I would normally stay. At the time, it appeared that Wyndham would be taken over by Choice so I did not mind. However, that merger didn't happen, but the Wyndham program invited me for two time share visits - the one in San Antonio back in March and upcoming one in Destin FL in June. The one **Holiday Inn Express** night in upstate NY earned 4445 points from the stay and what I get for using the IHG credit card from Chase.

Of course, all of the meals and other charges earned miles/points from the card used. To pay in cash would be pointless! Normally, my card of choice is the **AA Aviator Card from Barclays**. However, because of the extreme amount of charges in March and April for future travel and a major home repair, I was close to the \$22,500 credit limit before my March pymt posted on 4/22. [All of our credit cards are set-up for auto payment and the balance is paid in full each month.] For over a week, we switched to use other credit cards.

I am just back from a weekend trip to Illinois [4/27 6-27] and will be writing that up next. I would like to finish it before fly back to ORD on 5/4 so I can attend a NRHS BOD meeting on 5/5 in Cedar Rapids Iowa and then ride a private train on the **Iowa Interstate Railroad** [IAIS] to Silvis IL on Monday 5/6. I fly back to PHL from ORD on Tuesday 5/6.