

FEBRUARY - 2025

Because of the postponed South American cruise, I wouldn't be traveling for over a month. That is NOT like me. Plus, I was scheduled for a knee replacement operation on 3/6 that would put me out of action for several weeks after that. Where could I go in the time available? Local NMRA and church events prevented me from traveling the weekends of 2/8-9 and 2/15-16.

PRINCETON, NJ 2/6/25

This was a spontaneous trip. A model RR friend, Tom Lavin, who used to live in South Jersey died and I traveled here to attend his funeral. I had not seen him in several years [except on zoom during the scandemic] because he moved from SJ to the Atlanta area about five years ago. We had several things in common: Irish, Catholic, CPA and intense involvement with model trains. When I was the Treasurer of the NMRA in 2009-2010, Tom was my assistant. He was 82 and died after a short battle with leukemia. I haven't been to a funeral service in at least two years – guess that is a good thing. I probably would not have gone except Carol was driving to CT that AM and could drop me off in Princeton along the way.



There was supposed to be bad winter weather [snow, sleet & freezing rain] the night before. However, like other supposed storms this winter, it turned to be nothing except for a coating of ice on the car. We scrapped the windows and left our house by 835AM and were at St. Peter's RC Church in downtown Princeton at 840AM. The roads were fine though we did see the remains of two weather-related accidents. Carol said good-bye and headed up RT 206. She took her time. The roads were very slushy in northern NJ. Finally after making several stops, she arrived at our daughter Colleen's house in North Franklin CT about 5PM.



Tom's whole family was there including his grandchildren, nieces & nephews. The casket was led in/out by a bagpiper. The deacon at the mass was his brother-in-law. His oldest son, a police sergeant, gave a nice eulogy. The funeral procession leaving the church had a police escort. I was surprised that I didn't see any of my SJ model RR friends there. I had hoped to get a ride partway home with one of them. Not a problem as I considered that in advance and had **Plan B** all thought out.

NJT's Princeton Train Station was about .7 miles away – a 20-minute walk thru the Princeton Univ. campus. If the weather had been nicer, I would have walked, but this day the sidewalks

were a bit icy and it was raining. So instead, I rode an orange [my color] *Tiger Transit* bus. PU supplies bus service throughout the town that is free for everyone. A sign at the bus stop by the church explained the routes and I waited a few minutes for the #4 bus that ended up taking me on a tour of the campus and town. It went down “The Street” that is lined with “eating clubs” on both sides. Essentially, these are fraternities in all but name only. In Nov. 1973, I participated in a debate tournament on the PU campus and attended a reception in one of the eating clubs.



I was on the bus for almost 30 minutes. Students got on and off at various stops. I could not help but notice that the many, maybe a majority of them, seemed to be int’l students whom perhaps are better able to pay PU’s estimated \$84K gross annual cost. Though the #4 bus would have eventually taken me to **NJT’s Princeton Junction Station** on the NEC, I choose to exit at 1205PM at the current campus station that opened in 2014 when service was cut back from a station built in 1918 located closer to the downtown. The bus had driven past the older station that has a sign on it saying DINKY. This is the name given to the two-car train that goes back ‘n forward between the campus station and PJ.



This 2.7 mile, single track line is the shortest one with commuter rail service in the US. Back into the 1960s, there were sidings on the line that were used to hold special trains that came from NYP and DC for Tiger football games against its Ivy League rivals.

A train was sitting at the station. I bought a senior fare ticket to Trenton for \$3.45 in the TVM on the platform. The conductor told me it would leave at 1221PM so I had time to go into the WAWA there and get some lunch. It was quite crowded and by the time I got my sandwich, the train was leaving in a few minutes.



Before 1230PM, I was at PJ that has a large park ‘n ride lot and is where a large apartment complex is being built. The conductor did not pull the tickets and the first car said it was closed to riders. It was cold and still a bit rainy so I alternated between



being in the waiting room and being on the platform to watch the trains speed by. This included AMTRAK and ACELA trains in both directions plus NJT trains. On the other side of the tracks,



there were several platform cars strategically placed so that passengers could board trains stopped on the adjacent express track. I have never seen cars like these before and perhaps I



could make a HO model of it starting with a gondola. There were lengths of CWR between the rails meaning that a rail replacement project is coming. I waited for this NJT train due at 1252PM but it was late and came right after AMTRAK #131 to DC stopped at 111PM [5 minutes late]. A surprising # of folks boarded the AMTRAK train; perhaps some were students going home for an early weekend.

Had I thought about it in advance, I could have used my 00000s of AMTRAK's Guest Reward points to request a free ticket to Philly's 30th Street Station. I didn't see any TVMs on the west-bound side. Perhaps they were on the other side. My NJT train stopped in Hamilton and less than 20-minutes after boarding, I was in the **Trenton Transit Center**. Again no one pulled the tickets. There was no SEPTA train waiting so I continued with Plan B. I walked outside and waited for the next **River Line** train. It was scheduled for at 128PM but came a few minutes late. My senior fare ticket cost \$0.85. While NJT classifies this line as light rail [typically electrified service], it is actually a hybrid as it uses Swiss-made DMUs [diesel multiple units]. Operations started in 2004 and much of its 34-mile long route follows the original right-of-way of the historic Camden & Amboy RR.



After leaving urbanized Trenton, it runs thru a marshy area that once was the starting point of **Delaware & Raritan Canal**. I had passed over the remains of that waterway in Princeton twice while on the #4 Tiger Transit bus. On a cliff overlooking the Bordentown Station is the *Point Breeze Estate* that was the home of Joseph Bonaparte, the brother of Napoleon Bonaparte, from 1816 to 1839. After being closed for almost two centuries, the estate opened to the public as a park in

May 2023. I walked by the Estate some years ago with a friend from the area. From Bordentown, the River Line runs next to the Delaware River for several miles before moving a bit inland and running parallel in a right-of-way next to and in streets till it gets near Pennsauken NJ. From there, the River Line runs on its own tracks into Camden NJ. Because the line between Bordentown and Pennsauken still receives freight service from Conrail's Shared Assets, there is no River Line service between 10PM & 6AM.

It was about 240PM, when I detrained at the **Walter Rand TC** in Camden. The area around the TC is very dodgy. A man was yelling out *loosies, loosies*. The PATCO headhouse next to the River Line platform is still closed so I had to cross the street and go thru two orange highway barriers to enter the TC.



Once inside, I used my senior FREEDOM card to enter the **PATCO High Speed Line**. This is a rapid transit line between

Lindenwold NJ and Center City. I have been riding it since service started back in 1969. The line combined former *P-RSL* trackage in SJ and the former *Bridge Line* between Camden & Center City. A west-bound train came in a few minutes and after a quick stop at Camden's City Hall, the train was crossing over the Delaware River on the Ben Franklin Bridge. When the bridge was built in 1926, it provided for two rapid transit lines on its outer edges. However, the Bridge Line service did not start until 1936.

The train went back underground and quickly pass the long-closed *Franklin Square Station*. This station, that dates back to 1936, has stood there like a time warp for decades. It was



reopened in 1976 for the Bicentennial but closed in 1979. It had been under reconstruction [I could see the results] since 2021 and it expected to reopen later this year. I plan to be there [assuming I am home]. I exited at 8th & Market and took the escalator up to the SEPTA Station for the **Ridge Spur** of the **Broad Street Line**. As I passed thru the PATCO exit gate, the \$.70 senior fare was deducted from my Freedom Card. A BSL train was at the SEPTA platform but left before I could enter the station for free with my Senior Card.

I sat for a few minutes before another train arrived. That train stopped in Chinatown before rejoining the BSL at Fairmont, after which it ran on the express tracks to the **Olney TC**. On a seat in the train was an issue of the *METRO*, the free newspaper in Philly, in a special cover wrap



saying SUPER BOWL SHOWDOWN. I don't follow sports and had almost forgot that the Eagles were playing in the Super Bowl on Sunday 2/9! I made my way upstairs to board a #55 bus at 353PM. At 419PM, I exited on PA RT 611 & Rockwell, a block from my home and was there a few minutes later. A trip like this isn't for everyone but certainly worked for me and will add to my memory of Tom Lavin.



ASHEVILLE, NC 2/21 - 2/23 2005

This was an EZ trip to visit family & friends and to attend a decent train show. I actually felt bad about missing what has been an annual February trip for us for almost two decades. We could have flown to/from Asheville [AVL] but those flights required a connection in DCA. I don't think I want to fly via DCA on a RJ just right now. Our two most recent flights to this area have been to GSP in SC [some 45 miles to the south]. I actually found some good flights there and back but the cost in miles doubled when I went to book them a day later. Instead, we flew to Charlotte [CLT] and then made the 105 miles drive to near the AVL airport. We have done this drive several times before.



We left our house early to catch the 555AM train from Jenkintown and were in PHL just before 7AM. We did not check our bags and went directly to TSA PRE✓ that had a surprisingly long line. We had checked in the day before and in looking for the gate # while on the train, I saw that AA was looking for volunteers to be bumped starting at \$400. I immediately looked at alternative flights but nothing would have worked for us. The train show that I was attending started at noon on Friday and ran till 6PM. It was open on Saturday but we had other plans for that day. This schedule is standard practice in NC as the mostly Baptist folks there are in church on Sunday. As it turned out, the A321 was indeed oversold and the agent at the counter was asking for volunteers. Bummer, as we certainly could have made good use of those vouchers!

Because we booked the flight just three weeks before, our usual seats in exit row 11 were already taken. So, I took window & aisle seats in the rear exit row [24]. When we checked-in the middle seat was still empty. There were 42 folks on the upgrade list. I was #3 and Carol was #4 but only the first two cleared. When we boarded and got to our row, I saw that my window seat lacked a window. It never occurred for me to check Seat Guru, but I will know for any future flights on an A 321. A somewhat strange woman sat down between us who was having a bad day. She lived in Hamilton NJ and her UBER ride to the airport was a no show. So, she drove but got a flat tire. She arrived too late for her 6AM flight and was put on stand by for this

flight. She said she had left her \$7 bottle of water at the gate and had fallen down the escalator too. She said strange things and then started asking me about her connection to Sarasota FL. She seem clueless about flying. I looked up her flight and found the gate at CLT and told her how to make the connection. She did not realize that I was with Carol and the flight attendant sitting facing us thought the woman was with me. I ended up telling her some of my travel tales and later she said that she enjoyed the flight with me. The flight left the gate on time but didn't takeoff till 30 minutes later. The woman kept asking have we taken off yet and later have we landed, etc. The plane made a loop over SC [just south of CLT] and was finally at the gate @1033AM or 10 minutes late. Being in row 24, it took a while to get off the plane.

We often connect at CLT but doing that misses the construction in the main terminal there that has been going on for several years. An exit was blocked with sheetrock causing us to enter the departure area at one end from where we had a long walk to the middle and then up and over to the consolidated rental car facility. I had done my usual shopping routine for the rental cars and only went with a \$100 rate from Hertz a day before; I passed on its \$89 rate for an EV. We left CLT just after 11AM and drove nonstop such that we were near the location of the train show [Western NC Ag Center across from AVL] just after 1PM. The original plan was to have Carol drop me off and then go stay at my cousin's place. However, it was lunch time so we headed to the Culver's there hoping to have a walleye sandwich that they normally serve this time of year [for Lent]. Bummer, it wasn't available to the following Monday. Carol ate her lunch while I drove to the train show. I was inside by 120PM and sat for a few minutes to eat my burger.

The WNC AG Center is located on 87 acres and it hosts the annual *NC Mountain State Fair* in early September. Normally there are two train shows held there annually. *Autumn Rails* is sponsored by the French Broad E'N'Pire Scale Club and the February show is sponsored by a local 100% NMRA club. However, Autumn Rails was cancelled last year because the *Davis Event Center* [where the train shows are held] was then being used by FEMA [Fixed Everything My Ass!] in the aftermath of **Hurricane Helene** that hit the Asheville area very hard from 9/25 – 9/27. There were some doubts as to whether the February show would happen. However, it ran



as scheduled. This is mid-size show with about 200 tables and several modular layouts that

normally draws about 2,000 folks each year. I have probably been to this show about 15 times and always have found it enjoyable and have several friends who live near by and attend it.

I went up and down the aisles finding several bargains. The best of which was 10 recent issues of *TRAINS* and *CLASSIC TRAINS* magazines for \$2. At the rear of the building were three modular layouts: an HO one from a local NMRA division, a small Z scale layout and a large 3-



rail O scale layout. There were several neat scenes on the HO one including a drive-in movie theater with the sound actually coming from two antique drive-in speakers.



About 530PM, my good friend Dan Lang who was at the show for the Apple Valley Model RR club called to say it was almost time to go. He was driving me to a Carrabba's Restaurant where

Carol and my cousin Andrea Haulk would meet us for dinner @ 6PM. I told Dan I had a few tables left and met up with him at 545PM. We had a nice dinner. Dan and Andrea had met each other previously, but it had been a few years. After dinner, I rode with Andrea & Carol to Andrea's new apartment in Arden. She had moved there last summer after selling her house in Fletcher and getting divorced.

I was up first on Saturday and drove back to the train show to give Dan several things I had picked up from him the Springfield MA train show back in January. They were on the back seat of the rental car. He said it was good to see me again. Back at Andrea's, I had breakfast and waited from the others to get up. The plan for the day was to drive around the area and see some of the extensive damage from **Hurricane Helene that dumped an estimated 40 TRILLION gallons of rain over the area.** Various towns in the area reported 20"/ 24"/ 30" inches of rain over a three-day period. Because of my connection to the area, I watched many YouTube videos of the storm as it was happening, but that did little to prepare me for the damage we saw this day.

We drove first to Biltmore Village, a commercial area just outside of the Biltmore Estate. FYI - the actual Biltmore Estate, a major tourist draw in the area, suffered no damage, though there was some damage to its lands along the French Broad River. The Village was totally devastated.

This is a former Southern Railway Station that until the storm housed the **Village Wayside Bar**



& Grille. To the left of the tracks is the Swannanoa River that was normally 2-3 feet deep, but after Helene it reached a record depth of 26 ft. Further down the tracks and on the opposite bank



many buildings were totally destroyed.

Five months later, debris from the storm is still everywhere; several roads were still closed [bridges were washed out] and only recently was the dirt/silt removed from some roadways.



Oddly, just a short distance away but on higher ground, this former SR freight house was not



impacted. Leaving Biltmore Village, we headed east to the actual town of Swannanoa that bordered the river and was **totally** destroyed. Many houses and businesses were actually washed away. What had been a small stream was now flowing in a much wider ditch that still had the remains of cars and trucks in it. The supports for the bridge into the town were washed out



causing folks to detour several miles just to get to the other side. It was really sad to see all of this damage but what we saw later made me quite mad.

This is still an active distribution center for water and other supplies at an undamaged church.



We saw perhaps 00s of folks now living in old RVs and travel trailers that have no running water and probably no electricity. We heard, but did not see, that there are some folks living in tents and others living in the tiny wooden cabins that were made by Amish carpenters from PA who came voluntarily to help. It was really unsettling to see this when as late as early February holdovers from the Biden regime were still spending \$65 million to house illegal aliens in hotels in NYC. Those FEMA employees who sent that money were fired! The Biden administration literally spent billions over the previous four years housing, feeding and giving free education and medical care to the millions of illegal aliens that it allowed to flood into our country. Meanwhile, most of the effort to help the unfortunate folks in western NC came from religious organization like Franklin Graham's Samaritan's Purse, local churches and even the Knight of Columbus plus some NGOs. We drove by several smaller streams that feed into the Swannanoa River and saw more devastation- luckily it was mostly the surrounding trees, land and some small bridges.

After we had seen enough, we headed to Asheville's **River Arts District** located on its west side in a valley alongside the Swannanoa River. This used to be a popular tourist destination with its

many shops, boutiques and restaurants. Helene destroyed 26 galleries where some 300 artists displayed their works that were also destroyed and along with their tools and livelihoods. Fortunately, no one lived there. On the opposite bank, the flood destroyed a park.



We left shaken and drove about 50 miles into the Smoky Mountains [some of which had snow at the top] to Cullowhee NC where **Western Carolina University** is located. This is a state university with about 12K students that traces its roots back to being a “normal school” and a “state teacher college” much like SCSU where I taught in CT. Our reason for going there was to visit Andrea’s daughter Haley, who is a senior double majoring in Biology & Geology. Haley narrated our driving tour of the campus [that was not affected by Helene] and then we had a nice dinner at a Mexican place. I had a really dense flan for dessert. It was a slightly longer drive back to Andrea’s apartment in Ardene where she asked me to help her with two things.



FYI- While we didn’t see any damage to the RR tracks near Asheville, the NS’ AS line , the former Southern Railway route from Newport, Tenn., to Asheville, NC and then east to Grovestone, N.C., is still closed and should reopen by the end of March 2025. Further east, a 16 miles rugged segment, that includes the Old Forts Loops that I once hiked on with Dan Lang, was particular hard hit and it is not known when that part would reopen. CSX suffered

widespread damage on over 40 miles of its former Clinchfield line between Ervin Tenn. and Spruce Pine NC. The cost to rebuild that line was estimated at over \$200 million and reconstruction efforts will continue well into 2025. Four miles of I-40, the major highway connecting NC & Tenn., partially collapsed into the Pigeon River near the states' border during Helene and the highway had been closed since. Back on 10/18/24, Pete Buttigieg, Biden's totally inept Secretary of Transportation said it could take "several months or years and BILLIONS of dollars before I-40's reopening". However, even back then DOT officials in Tennessee noted a temporary fix could turn the interstate into a two-lane road. So, after \$15 million of emergency repairs, I-40 just reopened for limited operations in both directions on 3/1.

Later on Saturday evening, I went to check in for our return **flight** on Sunday 2/23, only to find that we had return **flights!** I hadn't noticed this when I booked the trip. I was just looking for the least miles for the needed times. We were booked CLT - RDU [Raleigh-Durham] - PHL and the first flight was at 928AM meaning we would need to leave about 6AM for CLT. I tried to do a same-day flight change but AA only gave me different flights for the same routing. FYI – as the crow flies, CLT & RDU are only 130 miles apart. I called AA's *Executive Platinum* help desk and was told that because we were booked with miles, the only way to make a change was to cancel the return and then book a new flight. I looked at what else was available and the one for the least miles required a connection in DCA. For slightly more miles, we could fly nonstop at 1102AM so I went with that. This way we could sleep later too.

Sunday, I was up before 7AM to finish packing the things I bought at the train show and had a quick breakfast. We were ready to leave about 730AM when Andrea came downstairs to say good bye. She suggested that we stop at **Blue Ridge Community College** to see the yuge wood pile there. I was familiar with the school as I had driven Haley there during prior trips. Haley was in a combined H.S. and college program there whereby she graduated in five years with a H.S. diploma + an associate's college degree. The school is located just off I-26. This is what



we saw and behind it were yuge piles of wood chips. I should say that everywhere we drove there were downed trees still on the ground and in some cases still blocking the parts of the road.

We stopped to top off the gas near CLT at \$2.89. I had filled up in Arden at \$2.69 the night before. It was 930AM as we pulled into the rental car facility. The car was quickly checked in and we drove 422 miles in the Chevy Malibu. We walked across the bridge to the terminal and went down to the ticketing level only to find that our priority check-in was at one end of the yuge terminal and the TSA PRE✓ was all the way at the other end. This is a stupid design!

We got to the gate early just as our plane, a smaller A319, arrived. This plane only has two rows of Biz class seats so there was NO chance of an upgrade. So, we stayed with our exit row seats although Carol was in a middle seat. We left the gate on time but it was over a half hour before we took off. We were at the gate in PHL at 1252PM after flying some 520 miles. FYI – the direct route is 449 miles and that is what is credited toward *Million Mile* status when flying on a paid ticket. There was no chance of making the 110PM train since we had checked our bags. So, we took our time. The next train to Jenkintown wasn't till 210PM but we choose to take the 140PM train to Jefferson and wait there for the next airport train. The Jefferson Station is underground and was a bit cool, but waiting there was better than sitting outside at the PHL station. We arrived in Jenkintown just before 3PM and were home 20-minutes later.

There isn't much to say about the miles/points on this trip. With the flight change, the round trip was 29K miles each. However, the 25K miles for our cancelled return flights have yet to post to my AA Advantage account. I earned 71 points on the car rental so that I think I now have enough points for a free day the next time I rent from Hertz. [This was one reason I rented from them]. However, I did notice that the Hertz bill was slightly more than the reservation. I emailed them and just received a \$4.92 credit. You need to watch the rental car bills like a hawk because mistakes are often made and I hate to say it but think many of them are deliberate.

OGDEN UTAH 2/28 -3/2 2025

What to do with the rest of the time available? The split weekend [2/28 - 3/1] was clearly open. So, on 2/5 I looked on-line for available trains shows and found a new website [trainshows.net] listings score of shows across the country.



There were several shows this weekend and the 35th **Anniv. Hostlers Model Railroad Festival** in Ogden Utah seemed the most interesting. On one website, it was described at the *largest show in the Intermountain Region* [?], while another said it was *Utah's Favorite Train Show*. This show runs Friday afternoon/eve and all day Saturday & Sunday. So, I looked how for flights to/from Salt Lake City [SLC] using my AA miles. It seems that AA has changed its BOOK FLIGHTS web page. Before if you wanted to consider near bye airports, you had to include them, now it seems they were automatically considered. So when I looked, the flights for the least miles were to PVU. [I can't bring myself to pay for a trip like this.] Knowing the area, I guessed that code was for Provo, Utah. Provo is the 4th largest city in Utah and one that is 90% Mormon [most of any city in UT] because it is the

home to BYU and the LDS Missionary Training Center. Carol & I passed thru Provo briefly last summer after the Rocky Mountaineer train trip to Moab. Provo is 45 miles south of SLC and that is 38 miles south of Ogden.

This got me thinking maybe there was air service to Ogden. Turns out, a fairly new airline called **Breeze Airways** has limited service between OGD & John Wayne / Orange County [CA] Airport. Interesting, but that certainly would not work for me.

Flying to Provo was doable because of **FrontRunner**. Since 2008, UTA's commuter rail system has provided service between Ogden to Provo along an 83-mile corridor of former UP trackage. As I looked deeper, I found there was a bus connection from PVU to the **Provo Central Train Station** that also sees Amtrak's *California Zephyr*. However, my interest and excitement quickly faded when I saw that there was only limited service between DFW & PVU with the result that I would arrive late on Friday evening and then have to return at 152PM on Saturday afternoon. Still, this was not a total waste for me as I enjoy trying to solve the puzzles that travel planning often present.

So, I looked for flights to SLC but since AA does not fly there directly from PHL, there would have to be a connection somewhere. However, I had all of Friday to get there. I could have flown PHL - CLT - DFW - SLC or made connections in the one of 4Cs [Chicago, Charleston SC, Columbus OH or Cinncy]. Since I was flying with miles, adding extra legs gets me nothing except another can of Dr. Pepper. I also avoid flights on the horrible EMB - 145 Tube Jets. In the end, I went with a PHL - PHX - SLC - SFO - PHL routing shown in map above for 45K miles + \$11.20 in fees. The SLC - SFO flight was on Alaska, a One World partner. Oddly, when I looked at the city pairs using \$, there was a 1159PM flight from SLC to CLT with a connection to PHL but it didn't appear when I searched using miles. [I always check the \$ airfare when booking with miles; occasionally it is very low so I go with that instead and save the miles for yet another trip.]

Folks have asked me how I book hotels. Once I know the destination, I go first to *booking.com* because its map shows **all** available hotels/motels. I note the ones where I am in their reward programs and then look at them individually. These days you will usually get a better rate [and points] when you book directly with the hotel. On rare occasions when none of the chains are available, I will actually use booking.com with my *Level 3 Genius Discount*. When traveling by myself, I usually go a bit lower on the hotel food chain, meaning staying at Choice, Wyndham or Best Western. For this trip, I had no plans to rent a car so the hotel's location was critical. FrontRunner currently ends at Ogden's former **Union Station**, where the train show was being held. Within close walking distance were three Hilton properties and a Marriott Courtyard. The Hilton's wanted \$125+ to \$141+ or 35K to 39K points, while the Marriott was \$144+ but only 21K points. Guess where I planned to stay and how I would pay?

Unfortunately, all this travel planning was for naught. After we got home from AVL, we went to Mass and then had dinner. I sat down at the PC for several hours to get caught up with my Ebay

listings. I had almost 20 sales to find, pack and print out mailing labels. When I got up several hours later to go to bed, there was a pain in my right leg. Given, this is the leg with the bad knee, I did not think much of it. I didn't sleep very well because of this and was in more pain when I awoke on Monday AM. Carol gave me some pills to take and said I needed to see someone. So on Tuesday, she drove me to a local walk-in ortho care center. The pain was worse but I did manage to walk to the treatment room in the rear of the facility. I was seen by a nurse practitioner who said the pain was from my IT band. This is a thick, fibrous band of tissue that runs along the outside of the thigh from the hip to the knee. She told me to use a heating pad and gave me pages with several exercises to perform. I hobbled out and we drove home.

I tried the exercises but they were too painful; the heating pad didn't seem to do anything. I googled IT band injuries and read it results from extensive physical activity such as running, rowing, cycling, etc. This certainly wasn't the case with me and the supposed cure was to avoid the activities that caused it in the first place [HAH!]. By late on Wednesday, I could barely walk and it was extremely painful just to stand. Carol said I needed to call the DR scheduled to replace my right knee on 3/6. [In the days before the trip to NC, I had blood work drawn and had a pre-op physical including an EGK with my GP in advance of that operation.] I was only able to leave a message that was returned on Thursday when the pain was even worse. Given, how I was hurting, I cancelled the trip to SLC and the airline miles and hotel points were returned to my accounts. The DR wanted to see me at 850AM on Friday. I hobbled to the car and Carol drove me there again. This time I got in a wheelchair as soon as I could. In the treatment room, the DR took my right leg, elevated and twisted it a bit and then asked me about the pain. After I replied, he said it was the sciatic nerve not the IT band. He then said no knee op until after this condition was treated. A few minutes later, I was taken for an Xray of my back, spine & leg and then saw a PA for the surgeon who operated on Carol's back a few years ago. The PA looked at the images and said it was typical of someone my age [almost 73 years old]. There were signs of arthritis and compression of the vertebrae. I said that is why I am now 5'9" when I used to be 5'10". He twisted my legs, tickled them, etc. I asked if a shot would help. He said yes but not until after I had a MRI done. In the meantime, I was prescribed a steroid that Carol had experience with. The first appointment I could get for the MRI wasn't till Sunday [yes on a Sunday] 3/16.

Who knows how this will play out? The knee operation had been scheduled to give me time to recover before a seven-day Viking cruise on the Great Lakes at the end of April. I still am holding reservations [w/ miles] for two train show trips— 3/8-9 in STL & Illinois and 4/5 in Denver, and now hoping for a miraculous recovery. I made those arrangements before the knee operation was scheduled in late January. I didn't cancel them if case the knee operation didn't happen, but never expected to be in my current situation. To be continued...