



Frequent Flyer

By Tom Feller
March 11, 2001.

This zine is dedicated to
Rose Feller
1915-2001



Intellectually, I knew that my paternal grandmother would die some day. However, emotionally I never really believed it. I guess the first inkling that she might be mortal occurred about 6-7 years ago when she gave up driving. Although Grandma was not the one at fault, a collision with another car while she was driving traumatized her to such a degree that she became afraid to drive. I can remember when my uncle Kurt described her standard practice of driving a tractor as "going like hell". We all remember that when you got your driver's license, it was a major event in your life. When an elderly person gives up driving, it's a major event as well.

I reviewed some of my old apazines to relive our times together. *The last time I spent Christmas in Wisconsin was 1995. In my apazine, I wrote, "My grandparents picked me up that [morning], and we had lunch. Taking my grandmother back to their duplex to rest, my grandfather and I went to a local bar."* I was still able to deny to myself that she was mortal, because she and Grandpa had the entire family over to their duplex for Christmas dinner. She still had plenty of energy for family functions.

About a year and a half later, Anita and I visited Wisconsin. *My apazine reports that one "morning we drove to my grandparents' duplex in nearby New Glarus to have breakfast. Then they departed for an outing on a gambling boat" in Dubuque, Iowa. Grandma enjoyed gambling.* Only a few years ago, she and Grandpa were still driving to Las Vegas twice a year to play the slot machines there. They liked to get up at 3 AM to gamble, because then it was easier to find the machines that paid off more. They had become such regulars at one particular motel that they took Wisconsin cheese to the manager each trip.

The following year we returned to Wisconsin for their 65th wedding anniversary. Now ever since I can remember, they always had big parties for their anniversaries that were

divisible by 10, but not the odd-numbered years divisible by 5. *When I commented about this to my mother, she responded that they didn't think she would still be with us for the 70th.*

I thought such judgments were premature, but I was probably just in denial. Instead of a big blowout party as in previous years, they had a modest reception at their church. I remember that our Laubscher cousins from Iowa, who sing together at church services, weddings, and funerals, sang "Edelweiss" twice. It was her favorite song. *I wrote that Grandma "seemed to have more energy than anyone else."*

We visited Wisconsin again the following year and spent one day with them. Last year, we went up for my niece's graduation and stayed with Grandma and Grandpa. My parents were in the process of moving to Florida and had no place for us to stay. *However, I found it disquieting that she was not up to attending the ceremony. They just went to the graduation party. We noticed that she coughed through most of the night, but she still had enough energy to get up and fix us a pre-breakfast snack. We spent a lot of time with them that weekend.*

In the last mailing, I wrote about our visit to them between Christmas and New Year's. On reflection, I think I was still in denial, because she looked better than I had been expecting. My mother tells me that she would perk up whenever one of her sons or grandchildren would visit.

I don't think I mentioned in a previous mailing that their duplex is part of a retirement community, which also included apartments, assisted-living quarters, and a nursing home. About two weeks before the end, she went into the hospital and from there to the nursing home. Grandpa moved into the assisted-living quarters, which are part of the same building. My parents drove up from Florida to help. By all accounts, they had settled in nicely. Grandma and Grandpa would have breakfast

together after which Grandpa would push over wheelchair down a hallway to his unit. They would spend the day watching TV and reading the paper. After dinner, he would push her back to her room in the nursing home. My parents felt comfortable enough to drive back to Florida.

About a week later on Friday afternoon, she enjoyed herself by playing cards and having her hair done. That night she slipped into unconsciousness and never fully recovered. *About 5:30 AM Saturday morning, my father called. He told me that they thought the end was near and that they would drive toward Wisconsin as far as they could that day.* They made it as far as Illinois before stopping for the night. After calling Wisconsin, they called us back to tell us there was no change. They reached New Glarus about 2 PM on Sunday. That night they called us to tell us once again that there was no change.

Still in denial, I decided to go on a business trip to Jackson, MS, on the following day as I had planned. My mother had my cell phone number in case anything happened. There was no call at 8:30 AM when I got on the plane. When I got to Atlanta, I checked the phone's voice mail. To my relief, there was no message. When I got to Jackson, I checked again. Still no message. I continued to our corporate office, where I spoke to my boss about the situation and went through my mail.

That evening I checked into the hotel that was the site on the Jackson DSC. I was enjoying a beer and a book in the Great Room when my cell phone rang. It was my mother to inform me that Grandma had finally passed away. She had the duty of calling people to inform them of the event. We chatted for a few minutes, and I went up to my room and called Anita. I kept my mind occupied that night by working on my personal web site.

The following day I arranged for Anita and me to fly to Wisconsin and kept busy until it was time to go to the airport. I decided my book wasn't sufficiently escapist, so I bought a

paperback copy of Frederick Forsyth's latest book *The Phantom of Manhattan*. It is a sequel to *The Phantom of the Opera*. I found it very easy to read and was already finished when we touched down in Atlanta. The book includes some historical characters. One of them is Oscar Hammerstein, grandfather of the lyricist. By coincidence, the younger Hammerstein wrote the words to "Edelweiss", which you will read about later.

In the Atlanta airport, I bought the third book in George R. R. Martin's new fantasy series. I had already read the first two books and was confident that it would be sufficiently engrossing so that I would keep my mind off Grandma. It is over 900 pages, which I thought would be far more than I would need.

I tried to keep my mind occupied by working at home Wednesday. On Thursday morning, we left for the airport. We thought that we had plenty of time to make visitation at 5 PM that evening. We flew Northwest to Detroit. Now I had stopped flying Northwest two years ago because of service problems. Unfortunately, we could not get decent flight times on any other airline. The first leg of the trip was fine. We had about an hour's layover so when we reached the gate of our connecting flight, we had enough time for a quick lunch from a Taco Bell Express. Our connecting flight to Madison started well and reached the Madison vicinity on time. *However, we could not land.* The temperature had risen to above freezing, but the result was dense fog. This fog was so dense that they closed the airport, and we returned to Detroit.

After we deplaned, we booked on the next available flight, which was not until 10 PM that night. After calling my brother in Wisconsin, we found a nice sit-down restaurant in the airport, where we had a leisurely lunch. Then we visited a sports bar, but the only items on television were golf and snowmobile racing. It was weekday afternoon outside of baseball season, after all. After a time, we walked down at our gate for a while and read. Finally,

we got tired of that and visited another bar, where we watched *Wheel of Fortune*, *Jeopardy*, and *Friends* before returning to the gate.

Although we were not physically at visitation, we were there in spirit. Our situation was one of the main topics of conversation. We also missed going out to dinner in New Glarus with the surviving members of the family.

Unfortunately, our new flight did not leave on time. First, a thunderstorm passed directly over the airport. When that happens, they don't let people on the jetways. Our plane was on the ground and sitting on the runway. Finally, the storm passed over, and the plane arrived. As we were boarding, we overheard someone say that if we did not push back by 11:08 PM, union work rules would cause Northwest to cancel the flight. We did not feel good. If this flight did not make it, we would likely miss the funeral. Passengers were still boarding at 11:08. A few minutes later, the pilot made an announcement. Fortunately, we were still going to take off. Unfortunately, they could not read the fuel gauges. They had to find an alternative method to verify that they had enough fuel for the trip. At 11:30, we finally pushed back.

The flight itself was OK, and it was sleeting in Madison when we arrived. My parents were there to greet us, and I eventually found our luggage behind the Northwest ticket counter. It had taken an earlier flight. We got to New Glarus about 2 AM and stayed with my parents at the duplex. Anita and I slept in Grandma and Grandpa's bed that night, while Mom and Dad slept in the guest room.

It was still sleeting the following morning when we had breakfast and cleaned up. Then my mother told me to go through Grandma's things and take what I wanted. I felt ghoulish and uncomfortable, but I selected some dolls, figurines, Swiss memorabilia, and other items. The sleet had turned to snow when we drove to the church, which is located in the countryside.

Before the service, we visited with friends and relatives. It is a small church, and it was full. Our Laubscher cousins had come from Iowa and sang. My niece Brenda sang "My Heart Will Go On" from *Titanic*, and my cousin Kim read a poem, which I am printing on the last page of this zine. Scripture readings included the 23rd Psalm. There were two ministers, the current one and a former one. Dan Herman, the former minister, recalled how Grandpa had worked him to exhaustion when they were building a parsonage 15 years ago. Mary Gaffney, the current minister, related what Grandma had told her when she got the position. Grandma had been on the selection committee. Grandma said to her that she had voted for Mary, but wished "that you wore pants." During the last conversation in the nursing home, Mary had pointed out that she was wearing a pantsuit.

In that last conversation, Mary revealed that Grandma had asked her, "Is it a sin to want to die?" She was in pain much of the time and also worried that she caused pain to the people around her. Mary assured her that it was not.

Grandma was a big fan of Swiss folk music, so a local couple, Ernie and Teresa Jaggi, sang a song in *Schweizdeutsch*, the dialect Grandma spoke as a child, and finished by

A Little Casket Humor

When Grandpa and the children went to pick out a casket for Grandma, Grandpa found one he really liked. It was very rustic looking and very suitable for an outdoorsman like him. However, someone pointed out that Grandma, whose name was Rose, might have preferred one like the rose-colored casket nearby. Eventually, they persuaded Grandpa to choose latter.

As they were leaving, someone said, "Since you're here, why don't you try the other one on for size?"

yodeling. The English translation of the title was "Evening Bells." Finally, the Laubscher cousins lead us in "Edelweiss". That's when I lost it. "Edelweiss" a syrupy song to begin with, so it was too much for me. It's been a long time since I cried that hard.

I recovered my composure in time to perform my duties as a pallbearer. We had to be especially careful, because the ground was slick from two feet of snow. Fortunately, it had stopped snowing by this time. The trip to the cemetery was highlighted by a small herd of buffalo that a local farmer was raising. It was the same cemetery where Grandpa's parents are buried, so a few of the relatives visited their graves as well. We made our final good-byes and returned to the church for lunch.

We visited with our friends and relatives for a couple hours before Kim and her husband Mark took us back to the airport. We didn't leave too early, as it started to snow again during the trip. Anita became convinced that our flight would be cancelled, so I got some hotel information. To our pleasant surprise, however, the plane arrived on time. It was late in taking off, because they de-iced the wings after we pushed back from the gate. This made Anita nervous, but I would have been nervous if they hadn't.

Our flight was supposed to go from Madison to Detroit and continue to Nashville. Another passenger, Anita, and I remained on the plane when we landed until to be told that they were changing planes. So, we got up and went to the gate. Our new plane left at a reasonable time, but quickly developed problems with the air pressure. So once again, we turned around and returned to Detroit. They found another plane for us so we left again after they de-iced the wings. We got home about 2 AM. By this time, I had read over 700 pages of the Martin novel. Our luggage did not make the flight, however, and was delivered the following day.

The following day was a Saturday, so we rested. By the late afternoon, we had

enough energy to take in the movie *Hannibal*. Anita did not like the ending, which was different from the book. I didn't mind myself, as I hadn't liked the book's ending anyway. I finished the Martin book that night.

Showboat—

Oscar Hammerstein II wrote "Edelweiss" while he was dying of cancer, and it was the last song he wrote. At the time, *The Sound of Music* was in production outside of New York before its Broadway debut, and he wrote it specifically for Theodore Bikel, who played Captain von Trapp. About 35 years earlier, he had written the book and lyrics for *Show Boat*, based on the novel by Edna Ferber. Jerome Kern wrote the music.

My parents stopped by on their way back to Florida the Sunday following the funeral and dropped off Grandma's things. After they left, we drove downtown and had a pre-show dinner at the Gerst Haus. I finally got the kind of food I would have gotten if we had arrived in New Glarus on time Thursday. Then we found a parking place near the Tennessee Performing Arts Center (TPAC). To our surprise, the musical was poorly attended.

Two years ago, the musical was supposed to come to Nashville, but the producing company went bankrupt. They eventually sold sets and costumes to another outfit that found a cheaper way to put on the show. One of their cost-cutting methods was to use non-union actors. The result was that the quality of the singing and acting was not up to the usual Broadway tour standard, but rather was comparable to the Tennessee Repertory Theater. Nonetheless, the music is so good that it overcame this deficiency.

The musical was quite advanced for 1925 in its handling of race. One of the key story lines involves the character of Julie LaVerne, who had a black parent. When this is revealed, she has to leave the Show Boat. However, another story line involves Magnolia Hawkes, who marries Gaylord Ravenal. Rave-

nal deserts his wife. Nineteen years later, he returns, and she takes him back. I don't see a 2001 audience accepting that.

Show Boat was supposed to have been our St. Valentine's Day date, but we were still recovering from the funeral trip. The local SF club met on St. Valentine's Day this year, so the day before we went to a modest romantic comedy movie called *Head Over Heels* and had dinner at the Boardwalk Café, where we listened to live music.

Saltare 2001—

The following weekend there was a Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) collegium in the Clarion Hotel down the street from where we live. Unfortunately, Anita's knee was bothering her when we got up Saturday morning, so we waited until after lunch before driving over.

We arrived in time for a class on 16th Century Italian dancing. The entire hour was devoted to one dance. However, it was very complicated, and we still hadn't learned it when the hour ended. Then we sat in on classes on drumming and Indian dance. Like Middle Eastern dance, Indian dancing is more of a performance art than a participatory one. Unlike Middle Eastern, there is little hip movement, but more emphasis on facial expressions and eye contact.

We had dinner in the hotel restaurant and a few drinks in the lounge before the balls. There were two of them: European and Middle Eastern. We went back and forth between them. In the European, we actually danced "Hole in the Wall", a very popular dance in the SCA, although purists argue that as a 17th Century dance it is not in the proper period.

Comments on #219

SFPA sightings—

I saw Gary Robe and Janice Gelb at Con-Cave.

Ned Brooks—

I also have the problem of a laptop that refuses to shut down. I have to force it to shut down with the power button. Our MIS director at work told me that the files in your Windows/Temp folder then do not get erased and was responsible for a keyboard lock-up problem I was experiencing.

Gary Brown—

Steve Allen starred in *The Benny Goodman Story*. James Stewart played the title character in *The Glenn Miller Story*.

I use the self-service copiers at Kinko's for my apazines. Of course, mine are smaller than yours so the higher cost isn't significant. They have no problem doing two sides and staple them automatically.

Re the Myth of the West: Although he calls it the Myth of the Frontier, Richard Slotkin wrote about this in three books: *Regeneration Through Violence*, *The Fatal Environment*, and *Gunfighter Nation*. I've read the latter two books. His argument is that the myth began at the same time as the actual events. Among the key developers of the Myth of the Frontier were

1. The novels of James Fenimore Cooper and Mark Twain
2. The 19th century dime novels and detective fiction
3. Newspaper accounts of the Alamo and Custer's Last Stand
4. Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show

In the last book, *Gunfighter Nation*, Slotkin discusses Edgar Rice Burroughs's John Carter books as one manifestation of the myth.

Randy Cleary—

In the Johnny Cash song "A Boy Named Sue", the title character is on a quest to kill the father who gave him that name. In the *Princess Bride*, a character named Diego Montoya is on a quest to kill the killer of his

father. When he finds him, he repeats repeatedly, "My name is Diego Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die."

Guy Lillian—

Anita and I went to see *Traffic* the other weekend. Between the cold, almost empty, theater and her dislike of the movie, she spent the last 45 minutes in the lobby.

The 2002 DSC will be at the Huntsville Hilton, although Toni or Randy will have to tell you where it is relative to the space center.

Whenever I read a Peter Straub novel, it takes me at least 50 pages before I feel comfortable and get tempted to put it down. However, I think the payoff is worth it.

Richard Dengrove—

The first electronic computer was ENIAC. It was designed during World War II and finished in 1946. You may be thinking of mechanical tabulating devices that used punch cards. In *Man and the Computer*, John Kemeny describes working in the Los Alamos computation center in 1946. It

consisted of seventeen IBM bookkeeping machines, and a staff of twenty kept the computer going twenty-four hours a day, six days a week. We were solving partial differential equations connected with the design of the atomic bomb. ... [It took] twenty people to work around the clock for three weeks to solve one differential equation.

By 1972, when Kemeny wrote, the equations that took those 20 people a year to perform could be done by a single operator in less than half a day. Of course, now it would be much, much faster.

You may have seen the Sixties TV version of *Arsenic and Old Lace* that starred Robert Crane (*Hogan's Heroes*) in the Cary Grant role and Fred Gwynne (*The Munsters* and *Car 54 Where are you?*) in the Boris Karloff one.

I have Harry Andruschak's e-mail address and hear from him from time to time.

David Schlosser—

In a farming community like my hometown, it was sometimes useful for a 13-year-old to drive a pickup truck in the fields during harvest or planting time.

I buy the Turtledove alternative World War I and World War II books as soon as I see them.

Janice Gelb—

I really liked Ken Burns's *Jazz* and watched every installment.

I don't recall what Salem Press required verbs to use with "they" for the indeterminate gender pronoun, but I always used the plural.

Steve Hughes—

Your story about the election "recount" reminded me of a George F. Will column during November that argued that recounts are not necessarily more accurate than the first count. He could have used your story as an example.

Eve Ackerman—

I got George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones* at the Toronto party at Chicon as a door prize. About a month later, I read it and got hooked. I read the third volume on my trip to the funeral.

Gary Robe—

I thought you and your staff did a great job with Con-Cave.

Jeffrey Copeland—

Anita and I bought the DVD of the first season of *Sex and the City* and enjoyed it. I had only seen two of the episodes, and Anita had seen none. We only started watching regularly during the second season.

Anita and I met John Snider, publisher of www.scifidimensions.com, at Chattacon and got on his e-mailing list. I think he has a nice site, but hardly one Hugo-worthy, even if we stretched the rules to allow a website to be nominated.

Grandma

By Kim Everson Nelson

On February 5th, 2001,
Our family had lost a special loved one

My grandma was chosen to join God above,
So difficult to accept when it is someone you love

Grandma was loving and caring, we couldn't ask for more,
She was strong and generous and much adored

By her husband, children, and grandchildren, too
Friends and acquaintances would say the same, they do

So I have thought and I have thought and tried to understand,
That this is a natural phenomenon to each one of us that exists on this land

But many people tell me it is not so sad,
Her life was long and wonderful, I should be glad

Glad because my grandma was blessed in many ways,
But my tears and sadness continue throughout these days

Yes, she was blessed with 85 wonderful years,
A loving husband, 3 special children, and so many other dears

Like 7 grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren, I hope I have named them all,
She was so very proud of each one of them as I recall

So through the tears and the heartbreak the last few days,
I have done a lot of sole searching and remembered her ways

I remember family gatherings at Christmas and Easter,
I remember the food-delicious, that is for sure

I remember the overall outfit I wanted with all of my heart,
I remember snooping in the closet to find it before Christmas had a start

I remember the yodeling man on the basement wall,
I remember the TV that you could put in a quick call

I remember the quilt you made for my wedding day,
I remember your kindness in each and every way

I remember your visit after our first son was born,
All of these things remembered, so this is why I mourn

Raspberries, strawberries, jam and cheese
Quilts, thoughtful cards, so I praying to God, "please"

Take good care of my grandma, the one that we all adored
She was a jewel in all of our lives and much, much more.