

Tennessee Trash #34 ½

✉ (Postcards from the Road) ✉

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 1998 20:29:55 -0400

From: garyrobe@eastman.com

Subject: Tennessee Trash Phase 2

HaHaHa! Thought you had gotten rid of me, eh? Well you don't get off that easily! Through the good graces of the Copelands who have graciously offered to download, print and copy this, I hereby send you the first internationally E-mailed SFPA zine! I am currently writing this in the sumptuous Marriott Plaza hotel in Buenos Aires. I'll keep adding to it as the trip progresses until I can download the whole thing a few days before the deadline. So here goes...



July 11-13 Kingsport TN to Buenos Aires, Argentina

In order for me to make almost any trip to South America I have to connect to Miami and take an overnight flight to the final destination. The upside is that I don't have to leave home until 4:30 in the afternoon, and I get most of a day with the family. The downside is that to get to Miami takes two connecting flights, and reaching the final destination involves a night of airplane pseudo-sleep. In order to recover from the overnight flight, I normally leave on Saturday and have a day to recover.

I had done almost no packing before Saturday. We decided on one last family outing to the movies before I took off, so we went to see *Small Soldiers*. The movie was over at 3 p.m. and we got home at 3:20 leaving me a grand total of 80 minutes to pack for a three week trip. I had picked out the shirts to take on the trip a few days earlier in order to have them ironed, folded, and wrapped at the cleaners. (Hint to travellers, this assures that shirts are presentable at

the destination, and makes them fit in the smallest possible space. I had realized on Saturday morning that I had no clean underwear, so I left a load running before we went to the movies. The load was finally dry minutes before the taxi arrived at the front door. It was inevitable that something would be left behind. I had asked Corlis to buy several rolls of film for the camera, and I dutifully packed them, I however missed the detail of packing the camera too, so there won't be any pictures from this jaunt.

In order to connect to Atlanta, I have two bad choices: US Dispair through Charlotte, or ASA (America's Shittiest Airline) through Atlanta. Since I would be flying business class to Argentina on American, that qualified me for First Class on American out of Atlanta. I decided to brave ASA. At first, it looked like ASA was running 45 minutes behind schedule, and I would make the connection in Atlanta with no problem. As the plane turned onto the runway, however, the pilot throttled back and sat there with the news that the Atlanta airport was closed by a thunderstorm. It took 40 minutes more to get clearance into Atlanta, which cut my connection margin to razor thin. I would have been much better if the brain-dead ASA person at the gate had told me the right concourse to find American Airlines! She sent me to Concourse D instead of Concourse T. Anyone familiar with the Atlanta airport knows what a disaster that is on a tight connection. It was not my hearing either, because I confirmed with the bimbo that was D as in Dog, and she said yes.

Luckily, I made it to American five minutes before they shut the door. The flight from Atlanta to Miami was routine except for one of the most spectac-

ular lightning displays I've ever seen from an airplane lighting up the sky for most of the flight. They weren't kidding about those thunderstorms!

From Miami to Buenos Aires, there were no problems, and I even got 4-5 hours of something resembling sleep in between. In travelling from north to south, one avoids most of the time lag problems presented by east-west travel. You make up for that, however, with climatic changes! I was going into mid-winter in Buenos Aires. Actually, the climate here is a welcome relief from the Tennessee summer. The days so far have been sunny with temperatures in the 60's, and the nights are pleasantly cool. You couldn't tell that from the people though. The folks walking through the streets of Buenos Aires are all bundled up like New Year's spectators in Times Square! If I wore a coat like those in use, I would be dripping in sweat within minutes. I suppose that metabolism has something to do with it. I have been quite comfortable in a business suit and a T-shirt underneath. That was even too much for most of the day. I got looks, however, from some of the people on the street like I was running around naked.

On Sunday afternoon, of course there was the World Cup finals. I have to tread a careful line with my friends about soccer allegiances. In Argentina it DOES NOT DO to cheer for Brazil. As it was, I would not have cheered for Brazil in any event after the first five minutes of the game. The Brazilians simply stunk! They certainly deserved to have their clocks cleaned 3 to 0! I went to a sports bar near La Recoletta to watch the game on a wide screen TV. I ended up making friends with the group of six at the next table. They were amazed at an American that a) cared at all about soccer, b) knew what the World Cup was, and c) could talk to them about it in Spanish. I ended up staying and talking and reducing the Argentine beer supply until about 9:00.

When I got back to the hotel, the stores on Calle Florida were still open, and there were still lots of people moving, so I walked up to Corrientes and over to Avenida 9ve de Julio. Sure enough, there were several hundred French-Argentines there celebrating the French victory in the World Cup. That is one of the things I like best about Buenos Aires. At night there are many people just out in the city center having a good time in one way or another. It is one of the best and most interesting cities to explore on foot in the whole world. It is also one of the few places in South America in which a visitor does not have to worry much about street crime.

On Monday I headed out to visit adhesives customers. This trip is different than the previous ones in that I am wearing two hats now. It also makes packing more difficult. I had to carry two sets of technical information with me, one for adhesives and another for coatings. I also have to pay attention to which card I hand to people: the one from the adhesives lab or the one from the coatings lab.

This evening I took a leisurely walk down Calle Florida and poked around in the hundreds of shops that line the street. Harrods looks as if it has fallen on hard times. The front of the store is very dirty and run-down, and there was not much of a selection inside. I did, however, find a treasure inside a bookstore. I found a spanish language dictionary of chemical and industrial terms! I really needed this book in my work, and I had been searching for its like in several countries for years. The day ended in front of the Casa Rosada as I watched the honor guard take down the Argentine flag for the day. It was a nice ceremony, and I learned something new. In the US they fold the flag so the stars are out. In Argentina the proper way to fold the flag is so the sun is out. One learns something new every day!

I have been fighting the electrical sys-

tem in the hotel with my computer ever since I arrived. In Argentina they use 240v which should be no problem for my adapter. The problem is that they also use a plug with slanted prongs that is used nowhere else in the world. The only outlet which accepts straight prongs is in the bathroom, and apparently the voltage fluctuates too much in the outlet for the laptop's charger to handle. I finally solved the problem by cutting off one of the lamp cords and twisting the leads through the US style plug. The outlets near the desk seem to be a power supply that the charger can use! Yet another reason to travel with a Gerber multi-tool! That's all for now!

*Hasta luego,
Gary*



*Date: Fri, 17 Jul 1998 18:26:15 -0400
From: garyrobe@eastman.com
Subject: Back in the BSA*

Hi there! I'm back from Uruguay, and we had a pretty good trip there. There was no local server in Montevideo, so I haven't checked mail since Thursday morning. The trip over the Big River was quite uneventful. Relations between Uruguay and Argentina are so close that the entrance inspector for Uruguay sits next to the exit inspector for Argentina in the Buenos Aires city airport. This has the interesting effect of making us technically in Uruguay before even getting on the plane in Argentina! Neat trick, eh? The other nice thing was that since we were pre-cleared we did not have to clear immigration or customs upon arrival at Carrasco International Airport. That was quite a hoot considering that one of our Mexican sales reps is Alfredo Carrasco.

Montevideo is quite an attractive city. The architecture is quite similar to Buenos Aires, except that it is a much smaller city and there are not as

many high rise buildings. Another difference is that the Uruguayans are much more open and friendly compared to the rather cold and distant Argentines. We had nice visits with the customers, but there was very little for me to do since there does not seem to be much product development going on in Uruguay compared to other countries. Mostly they are maintaining the same formulas they have used for years, or have been bought up by multinational companies who use Uruguay as a convenient point of manufacture to export into either Argentina or southern Brazil.

After we finished with customer calls, Waldo and I met with Marcello, the president of the distribution company that we work with in Uruguay. Waldo was not that interested in going out, but I wanted to see some of Montevideo. It was not a great evening to visit there since it was raining, but we picked a restaurant right on the shore of the Rio de la Plata, and watched the lightning strike over the water. That is, when we were not watching the extremely attractive waitresses bump the kitchen door open with their butts. That was definitely more interesting than the storm!

During dinner, Waldo and Marcello began to tell me some of the problems they have with Paraguay as a member of the Mercosul trade alliance. Paraguay is in many senses a big fencing operation! Most of the stolen cars in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay end up in Paraguay. The government there then issues a new title after three years that states that the car has not been stolen in Paraguay! They then re-sell the cars cheaply at prices way below those that prevail in the rest of the area. Unfortunately, they had to accept Paraguay into the Mercosul treaty, mostly in hope that contact with more law-abiding countries will make them change their ways.

After the restaurant, Marcello took us to his favorite neighborhood bars. This

place is famous enough to be written up in Newsweek as one of the best bars in the world. On Thursday evenings, Marcello has a group of friends that congregate there. The group includes many financial leaders and manufacturing managers from across Montevideo. There were several ex-patriates there, and the going language was English most of the time. Also the trademark drink of the bar is the Rusty Nail-Scotch and Drambuie on ice. I drank one, and didn't need any more. The ambiance of the bar was much like a really good consuite with a very interesting mix of people and conversation, all accomplished without the booming music that most bars around the world seem the think necessary. We floated back to the hotel at midnight.

I was definitely not at my best today. I slept like a rock for seven hours, but that was not enough to overcome the two bottles of wine and the Rusty Nail from the night before. Luckily we had only two more calls to make, and the people we met with did not have any really complicated questions for me.

We had a bit of excitement in the Carrasco Airport when our plane back to BA was late. They had told us at the desk that this was the case, but the monitor at the gate showed the flight as boarding at the scheduled time, and then departed! It would have been a bit hard for that to be true since the plane from

BA had not yet arrived. The airport was off schedule because a plane had skidded off the runway that morning, and the airport had been closed for an hour while they cleared the runway.

Tomorrow, I will go out with Waldo and his family on a drive through the city, and whatever else strikes our fancy. Unfortunately I don't have a camera, and I forgot to buy post cards of Montevideo while I was there. The weather has not been as good for the last two days as it was earlier in the week. The highs in the day are around 60 degrees F, and at night about 50. Sunday morning I will head off to Mexico, the second leg and third country of the trip. At least I remembered to re-confirm my seat on the flight to Mexico City, otherwise I could have lost it. I'll also be flying Business Class, so it should not be too bad of a flight. I'll get into Mexico City at 7 p.m., and then will go right to work on Monday morning.

I'll send more news as it develops.

Hasta luego de Buenos Aires
Gary

[[Editors' note: That's all we got via e-mail. Our intrepid correspondent appears to be missing in action. Could he have missed a plane? Mislaid his laptop? Been unable to find an out-bound phone line? All will be revealed, we're sure, in sixty days.]]

