

Columns

My, how the internet has changed travel planning

I am constantly amazed at the information available online. Just now I have been watching a “YouTube” video about a four-day train trip on a Canadian VIA Rail train which travels from Toronto, across the Canadian Rocky Mountains to Vancouver, British Columbia.

The descriptions of the train amenities and the scenery were outstanding and the host was quite interesting to listen to and watch. I became pretty sentimental watching the video because it was reminiscent of our 5,000 mile drive across Canada to Banff and Vancouver. If you would like to watch this video you can find it on YouTube at : (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qh_NAXayPUJ).

As I watched, I was reminded of my three-year stint at Charleston Travel Agency back in the 1990s and my early days of booking personal trips. We began traveling in the early 1980s and back then there was no computer. I had to go to the library to research our destination, write down names, addresses and phone numbers of hotels, restaurants and points of interest and then write letters and make phone calls to get travel brochures. All of the planning on these early trips took weeks and sometimes months to gather information.

I was equally surprised when I went to work for the agency, which had been using a computer for a couple years, to discover how much easier it was to locate information. They had tons of brochures and travel magazines and were connected to the “new” computer information highway.

I marveled at how quickly we were able to make reservations and buy airline tickets for customers. Sometimes it would only take about an hour

Memories and Musings

By Cheri Sims



for me to complete an itinerary for a customer when it would have taken me weeks to plan the same trip for us just a year or so before. Even in the 1990s there was no “YouTube” to watch travel videos but sometimes one could find a personal travel webpage full of destination pictures.

Fast forward about 30 years to 2023 and it is now possible to take an entire virtual trip just sitting in front of the computer or even on your cell phone.

I have literally never stumped the computer when trying to locate travel information and I have looked up some pretty desolate locations. Finding hotels in even the most remote locations is a simple click away, which is pretty amazing considering it might have taken days or weeks to find these places when we first started to take vacations.

It took me months to plan our first trip to Maine and Vermont. I had stacks of books from the library, wrote letters (because Hubby did not like long-distance phone charges) and accumulated a whole box of hotel and sightseeing information. I still have some of those old brochures and they are so fun to reread. Just for fun I re-planned that trip during the Covid lockdown and it took me less than a day to find hotels for a two-week trip.

I can clearly recall how long it took to plan our first Cana-

dian vacation. There was no computer to research passport and border crossing information. Finding details about traveling out of the country was a nightmare.

Calling Canadian hotels was quite intimidating especially when researching in Quebec Province because in the 1980s, very few French Canadians spoke English and I did not speak French. Now most of those hotels have websites geared to English and French as well as other languages. Times have sure changed!

I uncovered another interesting fact right here at home. This must have been the best kept secret in Coles County. While searching for a place to buy a strawberry/rhubarb pie as a gift I must have called every store and restaurant close to Charleston and then I remembered that for years Hubby used to buy them at “My Store” in Mattoon.

I have bought pies there and figured that like all the other groceries they were ordered and delivered weekly so I called them to see when their next delivery would be. To my amazement I found out that “My Store” has a bakery in the back of the store and for all these years the pies were made right in the store.

I do not know the current owners so I called Rick Podeschi, whose family was the original owners of the store. I found out that the bakery was started inside the store

when the new store was built in 1955. All these years, when Hubby was bringing home pies, he was buying them at “My Store” but had never told me that information.

Mr. Podeschi told me that the first baker was Dorothy Hurst and that they employed six other assistants in the bakery alone. Back then the strawberry/rhubarb filling and other fruit fillings were from Michigan and shipped in 30-gallon tins and the rest of the fruit and cream pies were homemade.

It is entirely possible that “My Store” bought that filling and other bakery ingredients from my Dad because Mattoon was in his territory and “My Store” was one of his customers in the 1950s. Why did I not know this fascinating information? Lucky for us, the new owners have kept this bakery tradition and all the baked goods are made in the in-store bakery.

I love strawberry/rhubarb any way it is made; jam, pies, crumbles, cake and even pudding. My granny made strawberry/ rhubarb pudding when there was not enough flour to make a pie and I actually prefer the pudding to pie. I do not have her recipe but I use the “Allrecipes” recipe and it is great.

Strawberry Rhubarb Pudding

3 cups diced fresh rhubarb
2 cups diced fresh strawberries
½ cup white sugar, divided
1 ½ cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon baking soda
1 pinch salt
1 cup white sugar
1 cup butter, at room temperature
1 large egg
½ teaspoon almond extract
1 cup sour cream

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Grease a 9x13-inch baking dish.
Mix rhubarb, strawberries,

and 1/4 cup sugar in a bowl; spread fruit mixture into prepared baking dish and sprinkle remaining 1/4 cup sugar on top.

Sift flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt together in a bowl. Beat 2/3 cup sugar and butter with an electric mixer set on medium speed in a large bowl until fluffy, 4 to 5 minutes. Beat egg and almond extract into butter mixture until incorporated, about 3 minutes more. Pour in the flour mixture alternately with the sour cream, mixing until just incorporated. Batter will be thick.

Spoon batter evenly over rhubarb mixture.

Bake in the preheated oven until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, about 45 minutes.

<https://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/223103/awesome-rhubarb-strawberry-pudding/>

Look to the western sky this week

This week and next we'll have no less than five objects in the western evening sky, just after sunset, that will change positions each evening. Tonight, Venus is the brightest planet but it's now lower — only 10 degrees high at 8:30 p.m. That's only the width of a fist held at arm's length.

As it gets darker, the star Regulus is just above Venus and the planet Mars is above and left of Regulus. Below Venus and farther to the right is Mercury. A thin crescent Moon is also there making a triangle with Mercury and Venus.

Tomorrow evening, the Moon is a thicker crescent and sits above Venus and just to the right of Mars. The Moon con-

In the night sky

By David Leake



tinues eastward each night, just “missing” the bluish star Spica next Monday evening in the west-southwest.

This Saturday, the CU Astro Society holds another free public open house at their rural observatory, southwest of Champaign. If skies are clear, we have an attachment where you can take photos of

the Moon with your smartphone. See cuas.org for details and call our hotline (217-351-2567) if the skies are uncertain.

David Leake is retired Planetarium Director of Staerkel Planetarium at Parkland College and co-founder of the Champaign-Urbana Astronomical Society, Inc.

Your sign to start back-to-school shopping

There are only five weeks until the start of another school year.

In case you're waiting to do your back to school shopping for the tax-free weekend, I'll volunteer to break the bad news that there isn't one this year.

So start that shopping now. Retailers are having sales on many big-ticket items, like backpacks, which, to my horror at a big chain grocery store last week, I saw the price tags of \$80-90. Sum-

Margie's Mess

By Margie Carter



mer shoes and clothes are also starting to get marked down since we're heading into the fall season for fash-

ion. That back-to-school outfit shouldn't cost more than registration if you find the right deals.

There's also the option of shopping at a consignment store, like Rainbows and Sunshine in Tuscola. While the prices may be a bit higher than a Goodwill, the shop is extra picky about items so you can be sure that you're not getting anything with stains or holes.

Supplies doesn't seem to go on sale until closer to the start date of schools. But if you're type A and just want to get your ducks in a row, schools have supply list on their web-

sites already. They're a little tricky to find. For Tuscola, you'll want to select “Documents” in the website menu and then “District.” You'll find the district-wide supply lists there. For Villa Grove, you'll also select “Documents” under the menu but you'll then click on “Elementary.” The supply list here also includes junior high.

Getting things checked off the list over several weeks will definitely bring the stress down. However, I won't deny

that I've been the mom running around from store to store in desperate search of a protractor.

My goal this year is to only be worried about getting my kids back on a sleep schedule the week before school begins.

As I said, there are only five weeks of summer left. Do yourself a favor, if you'll be buying school supplies this year, start chipping away at it now and avoid the stress.

A belated Father's Day story

Although Father's Day has come and gone, I'm still thinking about my dad weeks later. He died 37 years ago.

I'm gazing at one of the few photographs I have of him as I write this. It's a black and white photo and it was taken in 1933 when he was about age 7 or 8. I find it hard to imagine him as a bow-tied school-kid whose father died that same year.

He rarely talked about his childhood, but he made sure my brother, sister, and I had it better than he did. I'm sure I was a pain-in-the-*ss as a kid, but he never made me feel I was anything but a good son.

When I earned a little money as a paper boy or when I caddied at a ritzy golf course, I would buy my dad some cheap

So there I was

By Pete Buckley



Mennon's aftershave lotion or a box of Dutch Master Perfecto cigars for Father's Day. When he would open the clumsily wrapped gifts (I routinely used an entire roll of tape when gift-wrapping) he acted as if I had bought him a Ferrari.

This past Father's Day, I wore Mennon's Aftershave Lotion and a bow tie in his honor. The smell of Mennon's Aftershave still brings back memo-

ries of my favorite bald-headed Irishman with size 8 and a half shoes.

His 1942 high school yearbook revealed that he was a member of the Current Events Club (that must have been crazy in 1942 with the U.S. and the rest of the world involved in World War II) and the Glee Club. The Glee Club?!!! As the saying goes, my old man couldn't carry a tune in a bucket. When I was

a kid, the parishioners at our church begged him not to sing during church services. Not only could he not sing, but he had no athletic skill and he couldn't fix a damn thing ... three skills he handed down to my brother and me.

But he did have skills. Dad served his country in the Navy during WWII, and his ship was in the Mediterranean Ocean and later in the war, the Pacific Ocean. He was a signalman who also worked as an assistant gunner on a 20mm anti-aircraft gun. I later learned that his ship was attacked by the Germans in the Mediterranean and by the Japanese in the Pacific, but he never mentioned the war to me or to anyone else as far as I know. He did keep hidden in our house an old 20mm

shell in his sock drawer that my brother and I would handle periodically when he was away from home.

He was the first person from his family to graduate from college, thanks to the G.I. Bill, and he had a successful career as an FBI Agent and later, as a salesman, selling copper wire.

Although he was no singer, athlete, or handyman, he was good at giving directions before GPS eliminated the need. He was known throughout the family as someone who would give a very long, lengthy explanation of how to drive from one place to another, including the number of stoplights you will pass, to the color of the house on certain corners where you were to turn. Just as he was about to wind up his

15-minute directions speech, he would suddenly shout, “No, no, no, that's not it; I know a faster route” and would launch into another lengthy set of directions.

Dad could also weave a good story and tell a good joke. He was the kind of guy that would give his college-aged children his last crumpled dollar bill if he thought they needed money. He always made it a point to know all of my friends and their nicknames and they all loved it when he would shoot-the-breeze with us in his heavy Boston accent.

It's been 37-years since he died and although some might describe my dad as a bit of a dork, I thought he was the greatest. I still think about him. I love him.