

FISHERMEN'S VOICE

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News & Comment for and by the Fishermen of Maine

FREE

Uncle Walt and Orlando

Phone rang in early December. Half hour later planning for a nightmare was well underway. Oldest stepson and family were flying to Orlando for Christmas and New Years. Horror of Disney World crowds, lines upon lines of tourists, thousands of cars all tumbled and mushroomed through my usual dread of the jolly holly season. Now I love family, especially the grandbabies—but this was exceeding the envelope. How could I respond? Impossible. Course there was intimation of “You don’t really have to go”. Know enough not to fall for that one. Stay cool, say nothing, and hope for the best.

But I was doomed, winter headed for the tubes. Minor gift as we left a day late. Neither of us had looked at the calendar.

First stop a timeshare operation where scamsters lure the unsuspecting with free stays, tickets to the mercenary kingdom, dinners in Orlando’s finest. All for giving just ninety minutes of their limitless time listening to some overweight huckster tell how many boats, cars and houses he owned and all his money generated from sales of timeshares. Ten thousand, seven hundred ninety dollars would buy us forever, one week in a two bedroom condo in Orlando. Place I couldn’t fathom anyhow. Time we were done, Hosiah was offering 12 “free” anywhere weeks (gimmick ridden weeks at that), 2 weeks extra for the condo, cruise upgrades, no interest for a year, etc., etc. Unfortunately he’d now just sold the last unit and we, ‘lucky you’, will be buying preconstruction. Sure we will. No way of missing the desperation in his voice, especially after showing us this wonderful plot where a four-floored wonder would be erected encompassing stunning views of the ‘Magic Kingdom’ and downtown Orlando. Care to guess how many similar stalled projects there are in Florida right now? Piles of sand and multiple excavators sit, just waiting for the next big boom with expected year of arrival, 2011.

Lasted just one night in the “free hotel” and moved in with the family. Tommy and Ivana had taken a 3 bedroom condo for the two weeks they’d be down from Canada. This was a bright spot. Enjoyed some fine meals. Shared the excitement of Xmas and Uncle Walt with the grandbabies, Madison and Hallie. Swam in the huge pool and soaked up a few rays. Even got a few hours to scribble. Remainder though was foretold with the December phone call.

First day out, Sea World waterpark. “C’mon Grump, hurry.” The Adventurers knew immediately what to do and how to get there with no care of the arthritic ridden dread I carried. “Here’s the rapids, c’mon, c’mon,” as AJ and I tucked into the fast moving current. Down the concrete corridors, around corners, careening off walls and people, the left shoulder tries a socket exit as I pulled AJ into the exit cove.

“C’mon Grump, here’s the Dolphin Plunge ride.” Tommy points. I look up and up. Then lean back for further sighting. Huge tubes. Closed and open. Four person waterborne Avon rafts spitting out the bottom. Peoples with dazed expressions.

“Ahhh,” I stutter, and numbfounded ascend the 256 plus or minus stairs. Three of us. “Where do my legs go!” “Don’t worry about it Grump,” and we take the first precipitous drop into the chasm, up on the side, around, down. Sooner been in a floor bound wash machine. A near flip and down the next chasm. Darkness—no matter, couldn’t have opened my eyes with a prybar. Does this never end? One last final drop and the catch pool.

“Hurry Grump, we’ll do it again before the lines get long.” I with that same dazed look of earlier descendants. Slowly, with help from the bikini clad “water team” girl, I got to my feet and staggered to a reserved chair at the concrete beach to watch the machine-generated waves. I make do quite well with delirious descriptions of the remaining rides.

Part three of nightmare was the shopping. Enduring a few hours at the spending receptacles. Tried twice. Once, idiotically enough on Sunday afternoon. Unstunningly believable. The so-called “Premium Outlets.” Cars were lined up in each row waiting for individual parking spots to open up. Some parked on dividers, half into shrubs... Monday early would be better served. 9:30 am perhaps. Then just 30 spots left as we nipped in.

“Excuse me, sorry, sorry, excuse me...pregnant lady coming through.” We wove our way to a few shops where AJ found some walking shoes (afterward returned) and myself a sweater at 70% off. Store to store humanity. All scooping up the recession deals. Hardly a word of the English language recognizable.

Suddenly, by my right shoulder, “Pooma, pooma,” as a South American gentleman exclaims, “Pooma, I louve Puma,” and with wife and family in tow, wriggles through the door. Laughing joyfully his wife tells of his love to spend money at “Pooma” outlet. We looked in, must have been four cash registers with lines into the aisles cranking in the plastic. Puma’s got to mean “Love” in Spanish.

Two days before ’09 eve we all go to Epcot where we managed to get on one ride (Planet Earth, I think). Rest were booked solid just like the walkways, kiosks, restaurants and whatever. We start the walk around the “Lake.” Around the world’s country’s exhibits. Collect a couple of tequilaless margaritas for \$10 and \$7 ice cream sandwiches and somehow manage to ingest without severe spills. By evening it’s Florida cold and we’re drawn into the German restaurant for a bit of fun, food, and polka dancing, only to wind up spending the equivalent of down payment on a new car. Is this what Walt meant by creating a magic world for children? Only magic I could fathom was how quickly plastic could disappear.

With temperatures down in the 40s we shivered through a stunning fireworks display. Then managed to be far enough ahead of the pack to hop on the passenger mover, find the car and the turnpike, and get back to the condo safely. Must give the Disney people kudos for way they’re set up to move people and extract their money so efficiently.

New Year's Eve restaurant and dinner were the final smack as 'The Nightmare of Bad Dreams' ended with watered drinks, slippery food and irregular music. Orlando at its finest. The grand finale of a failing 2008 and perhaps presage to 2009. With any luck, "Great Grandbabies" will take pity on Grump and his cane and he can forgo Uncle Walt's most depressing invitation for a quiet chair on the beach.

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Hallie, the youngest, loves salad, and her dad, who like many of our extended family, believes in great food. Granbaby Hallie at 7 has begun working on a repertoire of salads. She asked AJ and I one late afternoon after a tiring day if we'd like to share a salad, her favorite. We enjoyed it so much that we have it minimum 5 of 7 and have shared it to great appreciation of friends.

Hallie's Salad

Raised head of Romaine lettuce (per 2)
Regular good olive oil – couple of blurps
Juice of 1/2 lemon

About 3 good shakes of garlic salt
3 tablespoons chopped cilantro
Fresh ground pepper to taste

Hallie, as with many great chefs, cooks by feel and taste. These are her written instructions:

Reciepe for Salad. Get olive oil and take it and twirl it like this  then take the lemon and twirl it like this  then you take garlic sald and shake it then you put cilantro and toss the salad.

Fair winds and good roads.

Lee S. Wilbur