

Game trip turns into an adventure

So you say you wish you could get tickets to the 2008 National Collegiate Athletic Association championships, the Final Four?

Good luck. Try applying for 2010.

You also say it would have been nice to have gone to the regionals last week on spring break in Denver?

It is one of those "Catch 22" scenarios.

Let's see, parking prices were jacked up an extra five bucks, to \$15.

Oh, yeah, it slipped my mind that you had better watch your p's and q's in the big city. "We aren't in Kansas anymore Toto," I got a \$50 ticket for making a U-turn on a one-way street. Man that hurt.

Let's see, it's \$25 for a 2008 NCAA baseball cap, and it isn't even baseball season yet.

Scalpers hawking tickets down the street want \$300 a pop.

At one point, I felt like I was being booked for the crime of entering the Pepsi Center. Metal detectors everywhere, backpacks checked.

"Mister, I need to look in your briefcase," said the gate attendant.

OK, I understand. *No terrorists allowed!*

I can understand that, but with all those hand-held detectors, you'd think that the President was in the building. It's just another basketball game, after all.

Then people pushing and shoving at the turnstiles, heading up the escalators to their seats.

Programs, \$10, and the aroma of fresh popcorn. "What? \$3 for a bag of dime corn, \$4 for a Pepsi? \$5 for a greasy hot dog?"

Good ol' Capitalism. It's the American way. What has happened to America?

I admit it, I am a dinosaur, waiting for the candle to burn out, no longer a young buck.

One thing, gasoline in Denver is \$3.04 a gallon. *I was lucky there.*

Then came the games between George Mason University and Notre Dame, and Washington State against Winthrop.

Winthrop? Sounds like some rich New England kid who goes to some stuffy boarding school back East.

Oh, but it's the NCAA Regionals, after driving out Thursday, fighting the highway and the crowd, my eyes were getting heavy, *ho-hum*, both Thursday games were about as



The Jayhawker

By Jim Merriott

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exciting as watching the corn grow just outside of town.

Well, let's see, after interviews and postgame comments by the coaches, it's 1 a.m. Friday morning.

I've got to find somewhere to crash, and I need to get to a drug store, too. My stomach is killing me after eating one of those tube steaks.

Somewhere down Colfax Avenue there is an all-night Walgreen's.

Let's see, Roloids, \$1.50, last time I paid 89 cents, and I still haven't got a place to sleep yet. As I drive west, no vacancy, no vacancy, no vacancy.

I've got to get some sleep. The only place with a vacancy is the Bugs Bunny Motel. It figures; it has been a comedy so far anyway.

What a dump, \$69 a night, better check for bugs, and let's see Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

"Man, I am tired."

At point, I just didn't care anymore.

Off came the shoes. I was so tired, I just laid on the bed and fell asleep with my clothes on.

Roughly 15 or 20 minutes later, I hear a commotion in the room next door.

Up goes the music, and the party is on, full blast. Some deep bass vibrating my bed.

"Well I had better call the front desk," I think. I don't want any trouble, I just want some sleep, but everybody else wants to party."

After two or three hours of listening to a half-a-dozen people raising cane, I hear a police siren pull up in the parking lot with the lights flash in my window. The next thing I know, there is a knock on my room door. "This is the Denver Police, open up the door please." As I struggled to the door with burning eyes from the brown cloud of city smog, I answered the door. "May I help you?" I said. "Have you heard or seen anyone suspicious?" the officer said. As I look up, a tow truck

pulls in the parking lot. "May I see some identification?" the officer said. So I dig out my wallet show him my identification. "Mr. Merriott, I see you are from Kansas, is that correct?" "Yes sir," I said. "There have been a series of automobile thefts in the area, and I see that your back seat is full of luggage and equipment."

About this time, I am beginning to wonder, is this some nightmare in a bad dream?

"I am sorry, but we are going to have to ask you to move your car, because the car next to yours has been reported as stolen, the tow truck doesn't have enough room to turn around," said the officer. So I move my car and finally the police leave after 45 minutes or so.

I look at my watch, 3:45 a.m. I got to get some rest. Interviews start at noon.

This time, I take off my clothes put on my p.j.s and crash. The next thing I know, there is a knock on the door. "Housekeeping, is anyone in there?" I jump out of bed, look at my watch. It is 11:27 a.m. Friday morning. "Come back later," I said. Then I hear the housekeeper's cart move to the next room.

With my heart beating at about 100 beats per minute, I jump in the shower, change into my street clothes, and hop in the car heading back to the Pepsi Center.

Again, no place to park. After walking five blocks to the arena, I head down to courtside, where television cameras and sportscasters are interviewing coaches and players at a shoot-around.

After an hour or so, I catch up with players from Notre Dame and Washington State, along with 20 other writers, as question after question fly from reporters from the *Rocky Mountain News*, *Denver Post*, *Boulder Daily Camera* and national newspapers.

After the question-and-answer period, it is seven hours to game time.

Then it's off to the ESPN Zone bar and restaurant for lunch with some of my old buddies in Broncos city.

"Hey, Jimbo, long-time no see," said one of the area writers. "All the area guys are getting together after the game and heading to Dave & Buster's for some brews and games. Want to go?"

After choking down an \$11 Cheeseburger, and a \$4 beer, the sports broadcasters began setting up for their talk show in the afternoon.

"Guys, it is great seeing you again," I said. "Maybe I will catch you guys tonight after the game."

"Hey, Jimbo, have you been keeping up on the Broncos?" one of the writers said.

"They are cleaning house. They let a whole lot of players go and have signed a new batch. You should head out to Dove Valley and check them out."

"Man, I am on a tight schedule," I said. "I'll see what I can do. Talk to you later."

By this time, I am trashed. I am so tired, I need to take a nap before the pregame.

Back to the Bugs Bunny. As I start to get out of my car, a stranger walks out of my room.

"Excuse me, are you in the correct room?" I said. "Yes, I just checked-in," the stranger said. "There must be a mistake," I said. "That's the room I stayed in last night. I am in there until Saturday. There must be a mix up."

"Some guy came and took your belonging to the office," the stranger said. "Sorry."

So off I go to the office.

"Excuse me, I was the man who stayed in room 22 last night," I said. "There must be some kind of a mix up. I am supposed to be here until Saturday night."

"I am sorry, but we are completely booked with reservations this weekend," the clerk says. "The night clerk must have made a mistake. That will be \$74.59 for last night."

So I pay the bill and it is off looking for another place to crash.

Finally, I find a motel in a sleazy area east of downtown, even worse than the night before.

So I lock up everything in my car, then head back to the arena.

The crowd begins to meander in, and the cycle starts over.

I think to myself, "Isn't it great to be alive?"

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A Familiar Face

Chapter one - by Kay Hively

Scotty Brown wiggled the strap on his backpack. The pack was heavy because it was loaded with books. He always brought books home from school, but today Scotty had extra homework so his load was heavy. Being weighed down with books made his walk up the alley seem longer than usual.

By the time he reached the back porch, Scotty was ready to sit down and rest. He removed the backpack and laid it on the porch. Then he noticed a familiar smell coming from the kitchen. The aroma of chocolate cake made Scotty forget his aching shoulder. He bounded into the house, leaving his backpack behind.

Sure enough, there on the kitchen table was a two-layer chocolate cake. A plate and fork were also on the table, and Scotty's mother was pouring milk into a glass.

On his mother's orders, Scotty washed his hands at the kitchen sink. Then he slid into a chair, ready for his after-school treat. Scotty was always hungry when he got home from school. Usually there were cookies or fruit to eat, but sometimes the snack would be his favorite - chocolate cake with chocolate frosting. And every day when he had his snack, he and his mother talked about school.

Almost forgetting his manners, Scotty dove into the cake and soon had his mouth full and his lips covered with creamy dark frosting.

After two big bites, the hunger pangs in Scotty's stomach went away, and he slowed down to enjoy the rest of his cake. Finally, his mother asked about school. That's when he told her about a special homework project he had to do on the weekend. And it was already Thursday.

Mrs. Brown listened as Scotty talked about writing a research paper. He said he had brought home extra books from the library. He also asked if he could use his mother's computer if he needed more information.

Scotty's mother asked him what subject he would be researching. Scotty frowned. Then he said he had to write about President Harry Truman. He said he would rather write about baseball or airplanes or even another president like George Washington or Abraham Lincoln.

Mrs. Brown smiled and told her son that he would just have to do his best, even if he didn't like the subject his teacher had assigned. Then, as Mrs. Brown picked up the empty plate and the dirty fork, she smiled again and told Scotty that he might be surprised. President Truman, she said, might be more exciting than Scotty thought.

Scotty didn't think his mother was right, but he didn't say anything. He just rose from his chair and went out to get his backpack off the back porch.

Reading about a boring president was not going to be any fun, Scotty thought as he picked up his pack full of books. He was just sure it was going to be a long, boring weekend.

Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Goforth-Stewart are both of Neosho, Missouri. Truman photo by Harry Barth. Produced by the Missouri Press Foundation. Copyright 2007.

Things to Think About and Do

- Three Presidents are named in this chapter. Where was each of them born? What is unusual about President Truman's middle name?
- Using math skills, calculate how many days each man served as President of the United States. Make a list of all the men who served as the Vice President under these three Presidents. How many of these Vice Presidents also served as President?
- Look through the newspaper to find somebody in the news you think would make an interesting topic for a research paper. Write a list of all the things you learn about the person in the story.

Next Week: Chapter Two - A Familiar Face

Visit the Truman Presidential Museum & Library at www.trumanlibrary.org