
New England - 2009

September 24, 2009

Our plane leaves for Boston at 8:00 AM, so we were up at 4:00 and on the road by 6:00. No particular reason for Boston, other than we have never been there. Bear has always liked the idea of Martha's Vineyard, and Cape Cod so we thought we would check it out.....

Expectations

Bunch grass and sand dunes on windswept Atlantic beaches, red fall trees, old buildings and cobbled streets, American history, clam chowder, Boston Cream pie, accents with no "r"s



September 24, 2009 – 9:00AM

Zorro

We are on the first leg to Minneapolis in an older Airbus 319 – the kind with no TV, no internet not even a music jack. Some people are reading the newspaper, others are chatting, but most are asleep. Bear is one of them, so I am on my own to amuse myself.

I got a haircut yesterday. (I know, break out the brass band and the ticker tape – Russ got a haircut!) It wasn't just any old haircut; I actually had to *think* about it.

Barber: motions me to a seat – “Hi, what can *we* do for you today”. (Presumably “*we*” means her and her scissors)

Me: Shoe shine please.

Barber: Smart Ass! Do you want to change the style or just a trim?

A change of style? As I think about it, I haven't EVER changed my hair style. There was that “Hippy” period from 1964 to 1974 but, other than that, I have sported the same “business guy” look forever.

Me: What would you recommend?

Barber: Well, a lot of men are wearing their hair very short, no real style, just buzzed short.

Me: I suppose I could try that, or you could make me look like Kevin Costner.

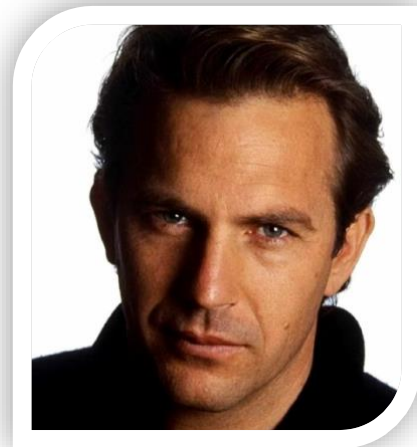
There are only three ways a barber can answer that:

- 1) **Okay!** – As in “OK! That will be easy, you already look a lot like Costner and your hair is perfect! OR
- 2) **Okay.** – As in “OK. I can humour this guy and make him *think* he looks like Kevin Costner”.
OR
- 3) **Okaay?** - As in “Do I look like Merlin to you? How am I supposed to go from *here* to Kevin Costner? The only thing you have in common with him is two ears”!

I got a long pause and Okaaay? - the worst possible outcome.

Me: Maybe let's just go with the trim.

Barber: Good Choice.



She wrapped a black plastic sheet around my neck and tightened it, just past the point of jugular constriction. I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. Not Kevin Costner, instead I saw double-chinned, red faced, Zorro.

The parable continued as she wielded her scissors, like a pair of duelling swords. Hair flew and I parried as she lashes out close to my ears.....



So, back on the plane - still bored. I am comparing my haircut with about 50 men in seats ahead of me, wondering if I should have opted for a new style

- 12C – the first guy I notice has a buzz cut – just like the barber said. It is salt and pepper colour, more salt than pepper. Fashion statement: *“I don’t give a damn – I don’t comb it – I don’t think about it”.*
- 13C – balding with a grey ponytail – Fashion Statement: *“Artist – Rebel – Bucking the system since 1965.”*
- 14C – cut short, wearing a ball cap. Fashion statement: *“Go Red Sox!”*
- 15C – young guy, cut short, top is greased up with pointy spikes. Fashion Statement: *“Trendy AND birds won’t land on it.”*
- 16C – Middle aged guy with great hair but a serious bald spot: Fashion Statement: *“Aging Chick Magnet”*
- 17C - The guy ahead and across from me has a standard *“Steven Harper”* hairstyle. Fashion Statement: (Oh My God, he has a dangling nose hair! Not just dangling, this thing is a vine, Tarzan could swing on it!)

I can’t do this anymore. Bottom line – anything goes. I think I will stick with *“Same Old”* for another decade or two.

September 24, 2009, 12:00PM

Defying Gravity

The second leg of the flight to Boston is delayed in Minneapolis— ½ hour, could be more. You should hear the complaining!

- *“Every time I fly Delta it is the same! Why can’t they get it right?”*
- *“Why wouldn’t they have checked the plane out before they brought it over?”*
- *“I’m probably going to miss my T-time!”*

In less than an hour this plane is going to be 7 miles in the air, travelling over 500 miles per hour and we have a 99.999999999% chance that we are going to land safely in Boston. These people should be standing on a chair, pumping their fist in the air, and yelling WooooHoooo! instead of bitching about a short delay.

I am spending my extra ½ hour coming up with a new slogan for Burger King. Bear and I are sharing a sandwich from a kiosk; most of our fellow travelers are lined up at BK next booth over. The average size of their patrons is well past 150% of average. I think I’ve got it:

“Burger King - Serving Whoppers, on both sides of the counter, since 1975.”



September 24, 2009 – 7:00PM

Norm!

Bear and I spent much of the late '80's and early '90's watching reruns of Cheers. The kids were little, so our entertainment choices were limited. When they finally went to bed we would sit down and watch a ½ hour episode. I related to Cliff Claiborne; Terri was more of a Rebecca fan.

One of the things we wanted to do in Boston is visit the Bull & Finch Pub¹ that inspired Cheers. It happened to be a 5-minute walk from the hotel, so we made it our first stop.

It was full of tourists. We met a nice couple from California who happened to be staying in the same hotel as us. We took each other's photos under the Cheers sign and, like the song says, we exchanged names:

*Making your way in the world today takes everything you've got.
Taking a break from all your worries, sure would help a lot.*

Wouldn't you like to get away?

Sometimes you want to go

*Where everybody knows your name,
and they're always glad you came.
You wanna be where you can see,
our troubles are all the same
You wanna be where everybody knows
Your name.*



¹ Charles Bulfinch was a famous Boston architect in the 1700's. Just a guess but, what do you bet the Bull and Finch Pub is named after him.

September 30, 2009

Oldies but Goodies

America is about “est’s” – Biggest, Fastest, Tallest Boston is no exception but their “est” is Oldest:

- Oldest Commissioned War Ship in the World - USS Constitution – “Old Ironsides” - 1797
- Oldest continually operating Bar – The Bell in Hand Tavern - 1844
- America’s oldest restaurant – The Union Oyster House – 1826

We visited them all. Ironsides was undergoing a restoration, after 212 years it probably needed it. 183 years later, the Oyster House has pretty much nailed seafood. At The Bell in Hand, I drank a few Sam Adam’s beers named after one of the founding fathers who, undoubtedly, drank a few ales in the same area.

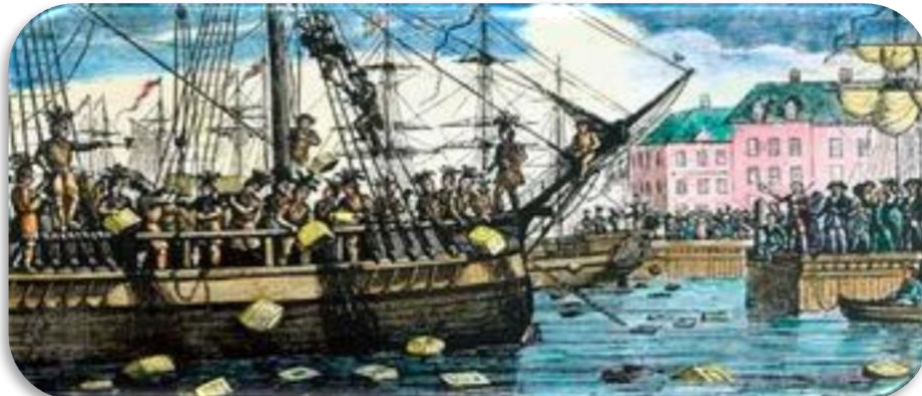


Things I learned in Massachusetts:

- How to spell M-A-S-S-A-C-H-U-S-E-T-T-S
- In Boston-eze: “Pak ya ca at the haba” means “Park your Car at the Harbour”.
- 21 Gun Salute = 1+7+7+6. Year of American Independence.
- During the Civil War, General Joseph Hooker allowed his soldiers to bring their wives and girlfriends to camp. Soldiers quickly learned that they could make a lot of money if they shared – hence the term “Hooker”.
- A “Scuttlebutt” is a barrel where sailors met to get fresh water and discuss the daily happenings on board.
- New Englanders are very friendly, except when working or driving. Behind the wheel or behind the counter they are obnoxious as hell, and proud of it.
- The battle of Bunker Hill didn’t happen on Bunker Hill. It happened on another hill nearby. The British Loyalists were in such a hurry to report their victory they described the wrong location.
- Trees don’t change colour until later in October – No red in September.
- A sure way to piss off a Brit is to dump his tea in the harbour.
- Being a Canadian in Boston, amidst all the hype about American Independence, is a bit disconcerting; we were the “other” team during the American Revolution and the War of 1812.
- They are “cannons” on land, but the same armaments are called “guns” when they are on a ship.

Favourite Sign:

- Drive-In Theatre – Matinee today!



October 2, 2009

As Good as It Gets

Our return flight left Boston at 6:00 AM. With hotel check-out, the taxi trip to the airport, security, and airport check-in we decided that we had to set the alarm for 2:30 AM. One of us (the one with no hair to manage) stayed in bed until 3:00AM but neither of us was in a very chipper mood considering it was just after midnight Calgary time when our day began.

The cab ride was a breeze. At 4:00AM there were hardly any cars on the road – we never got honked at, or flipped the bird, even once!

The trip home seemed to take forever but I have a good book (Henry Ford – The People’s Tycoon) which got me through the two flights and a 2-1/2-hour layover in Minneapolis.

Boston was great. We enjoyed Cape Cod and Martha’s Vineyard. New Bedford and Newport, Rhode Island were pleasant surprises we hadn’t counted on.

We stayed at seaside motels with bunch grass and sand dune beaches (Like in the movie “*Summer of ’42*”), ate hard shell crab at harbour side restaurants (like in the movie “*As Good as it Gets*”), we clumped along cobble streets, looked at old buildings and soaked up American history.

Regrets:

The trees weren’t very red, and we never did get Boston Cream pie – Next time!

