

MEMPHIS & MIAMI

2005

[UPDATE: June, 2011—As I gradually go back over my old travelogues, I'll be leaving the original text intact but adding additional comments in boldfaced enclosed in brackets to expand on what was originally said. I'll also add some additional scanned photos to enhance the original travelogues.]

It's nearing Christmas, and we've had a cold and snowy winter so far. The bitter weather plays tricks on my mind and makes me recall almost fondly the sweltering steam of summer.

This trip was just a little getaway that kept growing and changing. Back in the spring I had booked an extremely cheap plane ticket to Memphis, where I planned to begin another of those baseball getaways, seeing my former student play minor league ball. The plan was to rent a car, drive over to Nashville (which was supposed to be Brad's home park), and catch a couple of games there. The Nashville Sounds then began a road trip by playing in Memphis, so I'd see them again there before flying home.

The plan sounded great in theory. Unfortunately, by midsummer Brad had been demoted (temporarily) to AA ball. The closest the Huntsville team would be to Memphis was Chattanooga—clear at the other end of Tennessee. They'd only have one game there, too, so making this into another baseball road trip seemed pretty pointless. What's more, spending four full days in Memphis—even with road trips—didn't really excite me.

The plans changed a bit in midsummer. I had gone on a quick getaway to Dallas and Oklahoma City, where I saw Brad the right before he was demoted. My return flight from Dallas was overbooked, and I volunteered to be bumped onto the next flight. For that I earned a certificate redeemable for a roundtrip flight anywhere in the U.S. I chose to do a trip within a trip, redeeming the free flight for a ticket from Memphis to Miami, a city I'd never been to (except cruising through the distant suburbs on a tollway) and had always had some interest in. From the airline's point of view these were two entirely separate trips—but in fact I didn't even leave Memphis airport on the way down **[which was easy to do with only carry-on luggage]**. The trip combined to make an interesting "last hurrah" before school started in the fall.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 12 →

ALGONA, IOWA TO DES MOINES, IOWA

[Something that jumps out at me in revising this is how late these dates are. The past couple of years we've been in school by the 15th of August, so the schedule of this trip would have been impossible. LONG gone are the days when school started at Labor Day.]

I spent most of the day today cleaning my apartment, something I had neglected most of the summer that was badly in need to doing. I had to wait until 2pm (twenty-four hours before my second flight departed) to check in. I logged onto the internet, checked in easily, and printed out my boarding passes for both flights. Then I set off on my way at about 2:10. **[I don't really follow why the airlines have that twenty-four hour advance check-on rule. It's especially annoying on return trips, when you typically have to check in from a hotel. It's hard to believe people's plans would change even a week prior to departure, so I'd think they could do the check-in further in advance with no problem.]**



Website photo of Quality Inn—Events Center [How they managed to get an empty parking lot in the picture, I have no clue.]

I stopped for gas in Ankeny, where I paid \$2.39⁹ a gallon, one of the highest prices I had ever paid—yet. No one could know in August that within a month Hurricane Katrina would push the price over \$3. I had a meal best described as "lupper" (French onion soup and a danish) at the Panera café in Ankeny and bought some shoes for school at the Shoe Carnival store there. I then drove over to West Des Moines, where I bought some books and magazines at the huge Barnes & Noble store there.

I had made a reservation at the Quality Inn—Events Center, a downtown high rise that used to be seedy (when it was the Starlite Village Best Western) but has been renovated into a very nice place to stay. It's also a bit on the pricey side, but it was almost literally the only place in town available. I had wondered when I booked why everything was full, and as I checked in it became instantly clear. The people in front of me in line were asking for directions to the state fairgrounds. This hotel, like all the rest in town, was full of fairgoers.

I checked in, got settled into the room, and had a nice rest in a comfortable bed.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 13 → DES MOINES, IOWA TO MIAMI, FLORIDA

It rained quite a bit through the night and was still dripping this morning. I was more than a bit worried whether my car would start. I had experienced **numerous** problems starting the car in wet weather before (which have since had fixed—thank goodness), including twice having to push the car to start it at Margaret's house. Before I even showered this morning I went outside and made sure the car was okay. Fortunately, it started right up—a big relief.

The Quality Inn offers a free hot breakfast buffet (mostly scrambled eggs) in their restaurant, and I had a few bites before setting out.

I drove through downtown Des Moines and then headed west and south toward the airport. I was surprised when I got to the corner of Fleur and Grand, near the downtown technical high school. There used to be a really complicated intersection there with streets coming in at odd angles and traffic controlled by hard-to-see lights. Now there's a big interchange, as if Fleur Drive were an expressway. **[I went hiking on the Des Moines riverfront a couple weeks ago and ended up in this area. I don't think I'd been on Fleur Drive since this trip, and it surprised me again how it had changed.]**

I stopped briefly at a Walgreen's on Fleur Drive, where I mostly picked up juice that I'd drink through the day. **[I gather this was before the ban on liquids past security.]** Then I headed off to "Airport 2", the new discount parking lot on the east side of Fleur Drive, across the street from Des Moines International Airport. Parking in this lot costs \$4 a day (the same price as in Mason City **[MCW has since done away with parking fees all together]**), as compared with \$8 or \$12 in the closer-in lot or ramp. I'm not sure I'd want to be in the open lot in winter **[though I'd do exactly that on a later trip]**, but in August it was the obvious choice.

They have circulator buses that serve all the airport parking areas. At "Airport 2" you're supposed to pick up a phone to request that a bus come get you, but one happened to be dropping someone else off just as I arrived. (Actually, it would be perfectly possible to walk from even the most distant part of Airport 2 to the terminal; I've walked farther in the parking lots of some malls. The bus is convenient with luggage, though.) I was the only passenger on the trip to the terminal, and I was amused that each time we made a turn the driver had to radio his exact location to a central controller. I'd think they'd have a global positioning device to take care of that—if there were any need for the information at all. **[This really did seem silly.]**

Since I was already checked in and had only carry-on luggage, I headed straight to security. I made it through there in no time and had about an hour to kill before the plane boarded. **[Regular readers will note I'm almost always at airports WELL ahead of time. I'd much rather be early and have time to kill than be late and either rush or miss my flight.]** I began reading one of the most fascinating books I've read in a while. *The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy* may sound deadly dull, but it really was quite interesting. I'd read a review of the book in *Time* and picked it up on a whim. The title tells the "plot" of this non-fiction treatise. An economics professor traced the life of a "typical" T-shirt from its origins in a Texas cotton field to garment mills in China to a souvenir shop in Florida. She even follows the shirt into the afterlife—when it is rejected by a second hand store and sent on to a sorting firm in Brooklyn that fills container ships with used clothes that end up in the street markets of Africa. At each stage along the way the author interviews people (farmers, textile workers, importers, shopkeepers, etc.) who have contact with the shirt.

The book also gives a surprisingly balanced treatment of the "race to the bottom", where global industries have repeatedly moved their factories in search of ever cheaper labor—from England to Massachusetts to the South to Japan to Latin America and now to China. She notes that garment jobs have never been good, but they are always a step up from what was available before—particularly for rural women. It's also interesting that today even China is being abandoned by many clothing companies, who are finding even cheaper labor in places like Cambodia and central Africa.

The book would fill time nicely in airports and aboard planes on this trip. I had finished a couple of chapters when they finally announced boarding for my flight. **[This was seriously one of the most fascinating books I've ever read. It was written in a lively style and was refreshingly balanced rather than preachy. I'd highly recommend the book to others.]**

The plane (a 2-2 Canadair regional jet) boarded quickly. It was pouring rain as we left Des Moines, but we had an uneventful flight to Memphis. As we landed the pilot welcomed us to "America's #1 on-time airport"—which just happens to be Northwest's second largest hub. **[Apparently the Delta has eliminated most of the Memphis flights since their merger with Northwest.]** He also announced the gates for many transfers, but made no mention of Miami. That wasn't really a surprise, since my flight wasn't really a Northwest flight, but rather a codeshare flight actually operated by American **[a very odd inter-line arrangement, since American wasn't part of SkyTeam, Northwest's global alliance.]** I was a little more concerned, though, when none of the TVs in the terminal said anything about the flight either. (It turns out that in Memphis each airline maintains separate TVs that show only their own flights.) A sign said American Airlines was located in Terminal C, so I made my way in that direction. MEM is a huge, sprawling airport **[and it has to be tomb-like if it's no longer being used as a hub]**, and it was quite a hike over there.

I shortened the trip a bit by using some really weird moving walkways. In Memphis these are elevated above the main part of the passageways. They also go very fast and bounce up and down as you move along them. I felt as if I were on an amusement park ride, rather than just going from one part of the airport to another.

All along the passageway they had doors that led out to the tarmac. Each door had a sign saying "CAUTION – DOOR ALARMED – 10 SECOND DELAY". I'm not sure if that meant there was a delay between your pushing on the door and its actually opening or between your opening the door and the alarm sounding.

It turned out that American had only a single gate (or perhaps it was better described as two mini-gates with the same waiting area), which was located right where the passageway between terminals entered concourse "C". The single TV by that gate had only two destinations: Dallas and Miami. I showed the woman at the gate my Northwest codeshare ticket, and she assured me I was in the right place.

There was still about an hour before the flight would depart. I had some overpriced Starbuck's coffee and read a bit more of the T-shirt book. About twenty minutes before the scheduled departure time they called boarding—one single call for everyone on the plane. When I got on board, I saw why. For a flight connecting two major cities, this was an extremely small plane (an Embraer regional jet with sixteen rows in a 1 – 2 configuration). Not only that, but it was barely half full—maybe twenty-five passengers total.

This was actually an American Eagle flight. American Eagle provides connecting service out of Miami [**which is a fairly important hub for American**] to places like Key West, Mobile, and Savannah—as well as a host of Caribbean islands. Why Memphis is also one of their destinations, I don't know, but the schedule worked out great for me. Given the light load, it was also pretty obvious there wasn't much need for a larger plane to make this run.

I was the lone occupant of Row 16, quite a change from the jam-packed flight from Des Moines to Memphis. Row 15 was entirely empty, and in Row 14 the only occupant was a pilot wearing a Mesaba uniform. Mesaba is one of two companies that operates Northwest Airlin, the airline that is to Northwest as American Eagle is to American. I had an on-and-off conversation with the pilot, who was surprised I had ever heard of Mesaba (which serves places like Mason City). I was surprised that he lived in Miami but flew flights based in Memphis. He apparently flies from Miami to Memphis, spends four days on the job doing short hops around the South, and then flies back to Miami for three days off. He can apparently fly free on any airline, but only on a space-available basis. He usually ends up on this flight, because space is always available. This was the second time I'd encountered Northwest employees who "commuted" across the country (the other being a company executive who lived in Los Angeles and worked in Minneapolis). That's a lifestyle it's hard for me to even imagine.

The stewardess on this flight was annoying. That was partly because she had far too little to do. With only a handful of passengers, it took her no time at all to serve drinks. Pretty much no one wanted the snack boxes she had for sale, so that left her idle for almost the entire flight. She filled the time by attempting to strike up a conversation with just about everybody on board. Not much of anyone cared to chat with her, but that just seemed to make her more talkative.

Except for the stewardess the flight was quite pleasant. This small plane flew at a comparatively low altitude, so we had a nice view below us most of the way. The pilot announced that due to thunderstorms we would have to fly down the west coast of Florida, instead of cutting across the peninsula. That made for a fascinating view out my window, as I saw the coastline and the Keys from above. On landing it seemed as if we flew just above the treetops in the Everglades. It amazed me just how abruptly metro Miami began, literally starting at the edge of the jungle.

Even with the diversion we landed almost half an hour ahead of schedule. Unfortunately we had to wait on the taxiway. The pilot informed us that due to thunderstorms in the distance "the ramp" was closed, and they wouldn't let the ground crew out onto the tarmac. It was not raining at the airport, but I could see lightning off in the distance. I suppose the rules with lightning are similar to what they do for sporting events.

The wait turned out to be about half an hour, getting us in almost exactly on time. We didn't actually reach a gate. Instead we went to the "Rainbow Parking Area", where we boarded a bus that took us to a remote part of the terminal. I honestly have no idea just where the bus arrived; I only know it was nowhere near where I'd depart from a few days later. Today I just followed the crowd to the exit.

I continued walking past baggage claim and outdoors to the airport bus stop, which happens to be just outside the U.S. Customs facility at MIA. I had planned to use public transportation exclusively on this trip, and while I'd researched things, I was still a bit apprehensive about doing so. Getting around Miami would require taking a number of buses, and buses are always much harder to deal with than trains. Fortunately the airport bus stop was well arranged, with signs indicating which bus stopped where and maps and schedules for all the buses clearly posted. There were also posters about the fare structure and explaining exactly how to use the bus. That was nice, and it's something other cities would do well to copy. **[Miami's buses were actually surprisingly user-friendly. Many cities make it difficult to use transit and then wonder why they have so few riders.]**

Before long a #42 bus pulled up. I got on board, put \$2 in the farebox, and asked the driver for a transfer. The bus set off through a parking ramp and emerged on a freeway that was under construction. We crawled through the construction and then wandered on a most circuitous route through the Coral Gables area. I was pleased to find that an electronic voice on the bus announced every major intersection, which made it much easier to know where I was and when I would want to pull the cord to stop.

I had read several accounts ahead of time that implied that the area around MIA was unsafe. At least to the south and east (the area the bus went through) that didn't really seem true. It's a mostly Hispanic suburban area that reminded me a lot of Los Angeles. (Then again, lots of people say L.A. is unsafe, too—though I've never had any problems there.) Some of the older buildings are getting a bit seedy, but much of the area is really very nice. What I did notice, both here and throughout Miami, was how patchy the city is. I gather zoning laws are non-existent here. I saw a Ferrari dealership across the street from pawn shops, ratty warehouses mixed with hip night clubs, and luxury condos right next door to public housing. It's hard to tell good and bad when there's everything everywhere.

I couldn't help but remember the one big crime spree for which the area around MIA is famous. About ten years ago there were a string of carjackings involving British tourists in rental cars. Supposedly the tourists had gotten lost, and bandits had taken advantage of cars that were clearly marked with Hertz and Avis logos. Today most rental cars have no markings at all on them (except for a small bar code they use at check-in), so it would be harder for criminals to spot them. I wondered, though, just how all those tourists got lost to begin with. This is not a complicated neighborhood. The streets around here are all square, the freeways to downtown and the beach are obvious, and everything is quite well signed. It would be a lot easier to get lost around O'Hare.

Bus #42 terminated at Douglas Road station, one of the stops on the Miami metrorail line. Miami has a single elevated train line that was built around the time of the Bicentennial. It traverses the city in a reverse "C" shape, connecting neighborhoods to the southwest and northwest with a single station downtown. It's been criticized because it doesn't go to most of Miami's tourist attractions (like the airport and the beach), but it does a pretty good job of connecting workers with their jobs.

Most of Miami's metro stations are similar. While they're technically secure (you're supposed to go through a turnstile to enter), they're entirely open air and enclosed by little more than a chain-link fence. The turnstiles and ticket machines frequently malfunction, and the very bored looking guards seem to be there primarily to let people in through the handicap gate when the turnstile won't let them pass. The elevated platforms are entirely red tile, with steel and avocado enamel highlights. I saw entirely too much of them, because the trains ran rather infrequently on weekends. **[While I really wanted to like Metrorail, this was definitely not one of my favorite transit systems.]**

Miami's metro trains look like poorly maintained castoffs from the Washington metro. Their surfaces are beige, and the seating was at one time upholstered in avocado and aqua. Much of the upholstery is tattered, soiled, or simply missing.



Website views of Dadeland North Metrorail Station

I took the train three stations south. The first stop south of Douglas Road was at the University of Miami. Nearby were the bars, bookstores, gyms, and coffee shops you'd expect to service a college. The school itself was fascinating, stucco buildings with ornate architecture set among palm trees. Beyond there was the extremely upscale neighborhood of South Miami (much of which is an independent city). Finally I came to my stop, Dadeland North. It was hard to see much of anything from the station, which is set among a sea of parking ramps that serve several nearby shopping malls. The main exit of the station is to what is probably best described as a "shopping arcade", a mostly pedestrian covered street with a number of unimaginative chain stores. At the far end is one of the few multi-story Target stores I've seen anywhere.

I walked down to ground level, bought some tokens for my later transit trips, and walked over to the shops. I made my way through a narrow passage and around to the back side of Target and then crossed an almost empty four-lane street and then an abandoned railroad track. Beyond there was my ultimate destination, the Hampton Inn—Dadeland. The walk from the station to the motel was confusing, but it made some sense after I'd done it. To this day, though, I don't know how cars get to the place. **[I found out after the fact, by the way, that the hotel had an airport shuttle. At the time they didn't advertise that on their website.]**

I checked into the room, relaxed a bit, and then set off to explore the area. The Dadeland neighborhood (the north side of U.S. highway #1 in southwest Miami) was **extremely** dense, quite different from what I had imagined ahead of time. Most of the buildings around here are four to six stories, but there were several condo towers twenty or thirty floors high. They were all packed close together, with almost no space between anything. Much of Miami is surprisingly tall and dense—unlike the majority of Florida, which is sprawling and low-rise. I've heard people describe Miami as a European-feeling city, and that density probably has something to do with that.

South of U.S. 1, the neighborhood looked quite different. There things were still densely packed, but it was mostly an old commercial strip—again looking much like Los Angeles. I ate at a place along the strip called Pollo Tropical, a local fast food chain that serves chicken with Caribbean spices. I had a very spicy chicken sandwich, a bowl of beans, and a packaged “tres leches” cake for dessert. It was overpriced for fast food, but fairly tasty.

I was surprised that it was almost totally dark by 8pm. Miami is a lot further south than Iowa, so night comes faster in summer. I walked down to the end of the train line, Dadeland South, and toyed with the idea of taking the train downtown to see the city lit up at night. There were a number of quite drunk people on the train, though, so I decided it was wise to just get off at Dadeland North and walk back to the hotel. I was pleased to find the route quite well lit at night, not an unpleasant walk at all.

I called Margaret to tell of my adventures and then settled in for the night. Nothing horribly exciting today, but it was interesting nonetheless.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 14 → MIAMI AND MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA



Hampton Inn—Dadeland
Miami, Florida

The Hampton Inn had a wonderful breakfast [**very typical of the chain**], including eggs, spicy sausage, and bacon. I enjoyed a few bites and then set out for the day.

I walked to the train station and caught a train toward downtown. The route paralleled U.S. 1 throughout the southwestern part of Miami. I passed mostly residential areas, with stucco bungalows and small apartment complexes not unlike the place I live. Mixed in were little strips of business. There was nothing particularly exciting about it, but it wasn't an unpleasant trip either. [**In general I liked Miami. It has a glitzy reputation, but it came across as much more down to earth. I liked it better than the other places I've been to in Florida, and in general it seemed like it would be a nice place to live.**]

I got off at Brickell station (pronounced like butter brickle ice cream), just south of downtown. This is a **very** wealthy area, combining mansion-like homes with luxury condo towers and foreign consulates. Just to the north is a sting of office towers housing the regional headquarters of various foreign banks [**I hadn't realized that Miami was such a big financial center. It's hard to describe just how many Latin American and European banks there are here.**] and beyond that the endless construction that is transforming downtown Miami from a colonial backwater into a city of glass towers.

This part of Miami looks a lot like Cancun (or at least like Cancun looked before it endured this year's round of hurricanes) and also a lot like pictures I've seen of Sydney. [**Modern Vancouver also looks very similar.**] It doesn't look much like any American city, though there is some resemblance to Chicago's Gold Coast—with palm trees mixed in. [**Central Miami is VERY high rise. All the skyscrapers (especially the upscale residential towers) took me by surprise, because most of Florida (and the South in general) is far-flung suburbs. Miami has far more of a skyline than anything else south of the Mason—Dixon line.**]

More than anything else, central Miami is under construction. Supposedly a lot of that construction is financed by laundered drug money—funneled through those conveniently located foreign banks. I can't verify the source of the funding, but wherever the money came from, it does make for one of the most interesting and lively downtown areas I've seen.

In addition to Metrorail, Miami has a people mover system (Metromover) that connects most of the downtown area in three small loops. My intent today was to transfer at Brickell to the Metromover and take it to see just what was there. The mover line was obvious, elevated right above the street, and the mover station was directly connected to the rail station. However the mover station was gated shut, with a bored and rather unfriendly looking guard patrolling the entrance. He wasn't the sort of person I felt comfortable talking to, so I set off on foot. I followed the tracks to the next mover station, about two blocks away. That station was also locked up, though I could see one of the automatic mover cars whizzing by on the tracks above. I saw two more trains as I walked to yet another station, which was also locked up. Obviously there was no service today, but I couldn't help but wonder why.

Much later I found out that the service was cancelled because of some of that construction. This morning they were imploding an old hotel on the north fringe of downtown, right next to the mover tracks. They didn't want people going around right next to the explosives, so they closed the system. They apparently didn't bother shutting down the actual trains, though; they just continued shuttling from station to station with no one aboard. [**It was really weird to see the trains moving around with no one on board.**]



Locked Metromover station at Eighth Street – Downtown Miami

Almost all the travel books I had read gave stern warnings about the dangers of downtown Miami. In fact, I had switched from staying at a downtown hotel to staying out in Dadeland (at a cost of about \$15/night more) mostly due to those warnings. Given that the mover system wasn't running, that was probably a good decision—but at least by day it was clear safety wasn't something I needed to worry about. While I was just about the only white person downtown, I had plenty of companions—none of them scary. While there were a few homeless people, mostly I saw Hispanic families visiting the waterfront parks or window-shopping at the handful of stores. **[A lot of people—among them many guidebook writers—seem to be scared of Hispanics, but it's only very rarely I've encountered Spanish-speaking Americans who weren't hard working and friendly. It probably helps that I speak Spanish (and perhaps more importantly can understand it when I hear it spoken or see it in writing), but I've never had any reason to be scared of Hispanic people or the places they live. In fact, the few times I have been scared, it's most often been Anglo (i.e. white) people—usually ones who have been drinking too much—who caused my fear.]**

I spent a bit of time exploring Claude and Mildred Pepper Bayfront Park, which mostly offers views of the condo towers three miles east in Miami Beach. I also snapped a picture of the Freedom Tower, a stately building modeled on the Giralda Tower in Seville that used to be the headquarters for a newspaper. Apparently it's now just an empty shell, but it's still an attractive landmark. **[I read that since this trip they've restored at least part of the building and made it into a museum that tells the story of the immigration of Cuban refugees to Miami.]**



Freedom Tower – Downtown Miami

North of the tower they'd blocked off streets because of the implosion. The detour took me into a rather rough neighborhood of transient hotels, something more like what the guide books had led me to expect downtown would be like. Even this didn't really

come across as dangerous, though. I might not want to linger here at night, but by day it wasn't hard to avoid the rather hung-over occupants of the neighborhood.

I made my way south to Government Center, the one metro station in the downtown area. A sign here explained that there was no Metromover service **[why they didn't have those signs on the mover stations, I have no clue]** and also said that track construction was limiting rail service today to just every twenty minutes. I waited about fifteen minutes before a southbound train came along.

I was dripping with sweat **[Miami is just about the most humid place I've ever been]**, so I returned to the hotel to dry off. I showered again and used the hair dryer in my room to dry out my clothes. Then I set out again. I walked back to Dadeland North station and put a token in the turnstile. Unfortunately nothing happened. I kept jerking it, hoping it would unlock. The station guard, a young Hispanic man, gave me a look that said "what a rookie" and explained to me that all I needed to do was press a bar on the handicap gate and walk through there. Not being an expert in jumping turnstiles, that hadn't occurred to me. I'm sure a lot of people do that without bothering to put a token in, though.

I took the train back to Douglas Road and walked out to the busway outside the station. I transferred to bus J, which ran back to the airport, but by a much more direct route than the bus I'd taken yesterday. I didn't get off at the airport, but rather continued east down 36th Street. The route ran through a poor area of endless cement block apartments broken by the occasional dollar store, gas station, liquor store, or McDonalds. The most interesting sight en route was the Greater Miami Jai Alai Fronton, an ornately decorated arena where people go to watch and bet on the fast-moving handball-like sport.

Just north of downtown Miami the bus entered an interstate which became a causeway that joined mainland Florida with the barrier island of Miami Beach. The bus cut across the island, running past banks, drugstores, and supermarkets that serve the surprisingly large number of people who live here. **[I expected Miami Beach to be like the "hotel zone" in Cancun, but it's primarily residential.]** I got off at the east end of the island, highway A1A.



Miami Beach, Florida

along it for a while, admiring the view and marveling at the thousands of people who seemed to find it pleasant to bake themselves in the 90+ degree heat. **[There wasn't even much of a breeze; I think it would be downright miserable to just sit there in the sun.]**

I had lunch at a very seedy Burger King that seemed to be the hangout for all the homeless people in Miami Beach. **[Away from the beach itself, a lot of Miami Beach is really quite seedy. It's not unlike the area just off of the glitzy Las Vegas strip.]** I had a bit of a problem communicating with the black girl at the counter, who asked a question I couldn't identify. I had ordered a salad, and the question turned out to be about what kind of dressing I wanted. I hate to say it, but I can almost always understand Hispanic and Asian service workers more easily than black ones.

I paid for my lunch with Burger King gift certificates I'd gotten in the Garrigan scrip program. When I presented them, the counter girl looked at me as if I'd given her pesos. She'd obviously never dealt with gift certificates before, although surely they must get them with some frequency. A manager told her that she needed to enter them in the cash register just like cash and give me

A1A is shown on maps as a scenic route that pretty much runs the length of the east coast of Florida. Many years ago my friend Sandra and I drove along the northern part of this route from St. Augustine to Daytona. The part in Miami Beach looks a lot like that stretch. A driver along the route would be lucky to get an occasional glimpse of the ocean; the road is only "scenic" if you are looking for a view of condos and hotels. As a pedestrian, though, I could see the beach up close. While A1A runs along the west side of all the beachfront towers, to the east is a six-mile-long boardwalk that connects beach after beach. I walked south

appropriate change. She did, but I don't think she was ever convinced they were genuine. **[Burger King has since phased out gift certificates in favor of gift cards. Unfortunately, those are even more of an issue to process. Unlike some companies' cards, they can't just be slid like credit cards. Instead they have to first check the balance and then process them through a device entirely separate from the cash register. I don't have to go to Florida to have issues with BK gift cards; they're as much of a problem in Mason City.]**

The salad was well past its prime, but at \$5.49, I felt compelled to eat every bite. I also needed to use the restroom, but the place locked theirs and issued keys to customers only. While I was a customer, there was a long line at the counter that made it unlikely I would get the key soon. So I did as the homeless people do. I waited until someone went into the men's room, stood outside the door, and then walked in when they left.

I walked west from Burger King along Lincoln Road, a blocked-off street that serves as a pedestrian mall where the beautiful people go to shop. There were stores selling \$1000 suits, \$2000 dresses, and \$500 workout attire. I can certainly be a clothes horse, but even I can't imagine spending hundreds of dollars for gym shorts. **[I think it's silly when the kids I teach spend \$75 for a spandex shirt and shorts from UnderArmour, but I will admit that the compression garments (essentially the modern day equivalent of a girdle) do make almost anyone's body look better. UnderArmour is also dirt cheap compared to the designer goods I saw in Miami Beach.]**

I turned south near the west end of the island and walked through the South Beach area, where the people who shop on Lincoln Road live. About half of South Beach is made up of old stucco buildings with interesting art deco architecture, while the rest is the same condo towers I'd seen across the bay in Brickell. Books describe South Beach as beautiful, and the pictures certainly look that way. I must say, though, that it's the sort of place that looks better from a distance than it does up close.

South Beach is also supposed to be Miami's most "happening" area. There are bars and dance clubs everywhere, and apparently by night it's quite a swinging place. Walking through on a Sunday, though, reminded me of the many times I'd been to New Orleans on the Sabbath. Pretty much everything was closed, and those who frequent all the hip venues were spending the day sleeping it off. It would be hard to imagine a deader place than this "lively" neighborhood.

I found a bus stop outside an upscale grocery store and waited there for about fifteen minutes. Eventually I boarded bus "S" for downtown. The bus traveled across a different causeway, right past the huge cruise ship harbor. I never realized before just how enormous those cruise ships are; it's really unbelievable. **[That immense size—and the thought of how many people they hold—is precisely why I've never had any desire to take a cruise.]**



View of downtown Miami from Government Center station

So once again I headed back to the hotel to dry off. I showered yet again and this time used the iron in my room to dry off things, sending sweaty-smelling steam all through the room. I'd remembered heat and humidity from my summers in Mississippi, but this seemed worse than that.

After cooling off a bit I headed back to the train station. This time I went just a few stops north to Coconut Grove, a mostly wealthy palm-filled neighborhood near a harbor southwest of downtown. My first stop here was at a TCBY outlet right across U.S. 1 from the station. I had some gift certificates from the Garrigan scrip program and figured I'd use them to get a treat. That was easier

The bus dropped me off at the Omni bus terminal, which is next to an abandoned mall that is now a community college (not unlike the ILCC campus in Spencer) in the north fringe of downtown. Had Metromover been working, it would have been a short hop from there to Government Center. As it was, though, I had a long walk through the same seedy neighborhood I'd wandered through this morning. There were more homeless people out and about at midday, which made for an even less pleasant walk. As I always do, I walked with confidence, though, and I made it to Government Center safely.

Again my clothes were thoroughly soaked. Indeed, I probably looked as if I'd been swimming in them.

said than done, though. First, the place combined TCBY with Subway, but all the employees seemed to mostly work for Subway; no one really wanted to take ice cream orders. Second the young man who eventually did reluctantly serve me had never seen a gift certificate before in his life. After a long delay another employee showed him how to enter it in the cash register, and I eventually got a cone with key lime yogurt. It basically tasted like lime sherbet and was definitely not worth the hassle.

I walked down 27th Street to the bayfront area and then walked past the posh Cocowalk shopping district. I found it strange as I sweltered in the heat that in this city of sauna-like weather, there are surprisingly many outdoor shopping centers. Indeed it seems as if enclosed malls are the exception rather than the rule. Cocowalk is designed to look like a small-town Main Street (though with more traffic and worse parking than most small towns would have), but it was all new construction built by the same developer and functions like a mall. **[I've seen similar developments in the northern suburbs of Chicago.]** The shops are different than in South Beach, but every bit as expensive. I could have spent thousands of dollars on jewels and furs (if I had that money to spend, of course) or as much as \$10 for a cup of snooty coffee. Not having money to burn, I just walked along laughing in my head at those who wasted their money here.



ABOVE: Plymouth Congregational Church – Miami, Florida

RIGHT: Sign against Home Depot in Coconut Grove neighborhood
rowhouses, these have been gentrified into trendy housing for the wealthy. **[This was a really strange neighborhood, and I honestly don't know why these wealthy people want to live here.]**

Almost every home in this area had a sign out front opposing Home Depot's plan to build a store in Coconut Grove. I found it amusing that while the "SAVE THE GROVE" advocates decried big box stores, they seem perfectly content with that fake downtown and all its snooty shops **[many of which were themselves chain stores].**

North of the yuppie shacks is an area of stucco apartments with a sign proclaiming the original Bahamian settlement in Miami. Bahamians Blacks were the first people to settle here; whites didn't come until Henry Flagler opened a railroad down the coast.

[Something I don't seem to have mentioned is a historic cemetery in Coconut Grove. The cemetery features above-ground tombs similar to the ones tourists are supposed to see in New Orleans. There are similar cemeteries all over southern Spain, which is likely where both Louisiana and Florida got the idea.]

Beyond the Bahamian settlement is an enormous public housing project. I walked past it to get to a Wendy's, where I cooled in the air conditioning and enjoyed chili and iced tea. Once again I had scrip gift certificates, and once again they were alien to the workers. That's weird, since I've never had a problem spending them in Iowa. **[Wendy's has also since switched to gift cards. There, though, the cards are processed at the cash register just like credit cards.]**

At the west end of Coconut Grove, about a mile from 27th Street, is one of Miami's oldest buildings, Plymouth Congregational Church. **[I'd come across this because at one point I was thinking of going to church there. My time was limited, though, so I didn't.]** Mind you, "old" in Miami means is actually newer than the old west. This is a very new city that was mostly jungle until the end of the 19th Century. (In 1900 Key West was still the largest place in Florida.) The historic church is barely a century old, but it is rather handsome. I must say, though, that Spanish colonial architecture looks a bit out of place on a Congregational church. Even more out of place was the pink cement block building next door (what Methodists call the "education wing" and Catholics call the "parish center"—I don't know what Congregationalists call it, even though we've got one in my church too).

Northwest of the church is a strange neighborhood of what might best be described as exclusive hideaways. These million-dollar homes are barely a step up from the tar paper shacks that hid in the woods all over Mississippi. In fact, apparently at one time they were literally "po folks" shacks on the edge of town. Just like old inner city



Wendy's was at the corner of U.S. 1 and Douglas Road. Across the highway was a Walgreens, where I bought some pop. At the northwest corner of the intersection was Douglas Road metro station. I got on a train and headed back to the Hampton Inn to dry off yet again. **[It was amusing to keep drying my clothes with the hair dryer and iron on this trip, and it's a trick I've used again when I've visited other hot and humid places.]**

It was now late afternoon, giving me enough time before nightfall to make one more train excursion. I took the train past downtown and into North Miami. Just north of downtown is Overtown, a neighborhood I mostly know from riots that took place there when I was in high school. While still mostly black, it's clear Overtown has gentrified quite a bit since the '70s. The place is full of new luxury apartment buildings, mostly facing the Miami River. North of there things rapidly get seedier, essentially the same area I had gone through on the bus this morning. The train crawled through here, stopping numerous times as we waited for signals that were changed due to track construction. My original plan was to go all the way to the end of the line, but there really wasn't much of anything to see. I decided to get off at Northside station, where I waited on a platform overlooking a place called "Flea Market USA". I think I had just missed a southbound train, because the platform was empty when I got off and it was a **long** wait. Gradually the platform filled up with people, mostly Hispanic couples who had been shopping at the flea market. The one other Anglo person on the platform (a portly young man with a bike who would best be described as white trash) felt compelled to complain to me about how long the wait for a train was. I grunted something sympathetic, but mostly ignored him.

I had an uneventful ride back to Dadeland. A long ride on the air conditioned train meant that this time I wasn't even soaking wet. It was dark when I got back, but I made my way across U.S. 1 to a Dairy Queen on the strip. This was yet another place where the employees acted like they'd never seen their chain's nationwide gift certificates. In fact, I think the only reason they girl at the counter did take them was that she'd already made my blizzard. **[While I still point out every instance when I've had issues with scrip in my travelogues, those have generally gotten easier in recent years. Electronic payments of all sorts are becoming more common, and most places have gone to encouraging gift cards—probably since they can pocket money on unredeemed ones.]**

I made my way back to the motel, watched some TV, and had a very relaxing evening. While I can't say I did anything all that exciting today, it really was an interesting day.

MONDAY, AUGUST 15 →

MIAMI, FLORIDA TO MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

Breakfast at the hotel today was different than yesterday's, but still very good. I ate quickly, finished packing my bags, checked out of the hotel, and was on my way right at rush hour.

I took a jam-packed train northward to Brickell station. There I transferred to the Metromover, which today was running—with people in it. Metromover is similar to Detroit's people mover and sort of like an older version of the Airtrain I'd taken at JFK earlier this summer. The cars are quite small and have almost no seating (just a ledge at each end that functions as a bench). They operate entirely automatically, with no drivers, conductors, or other employees. While they're actually newer than the Metrorail cars, the mover vehicles seem to be showing their age even more. The car I was in had cracked windows and a leaky air conditioner that "rained" on almost everyone inside. Still it made an interesting trip. I whisked around the downtown loop and back to Brickell—more a novelty than real transportation, but fun.

Outside Brickell station I boarded the #8 bus, which is numbered after Calle Ocho, the street its eastbound route follows through the famous Little Havana neighborhood. I was headed westbound, so I'd have to just catch glimpses of the more famous street as I headed down Calle Siete (7th Street). I'd bet Little Havana would be a fun place to walk through, not unlike the Hispanic parts of Chicago and Los Angeles **[and New York and Minneapolis]** I've explored. By bus, though, it was a pretty boring neighborhood. It's different from much of Miami in that it's mostly single family homes (rather than condo towers or small apartment buildings), but they're mostly stucco bungalows that aren't exactly architectural treasures. The neighborhood is broken up by the same strip business you'd see in any city anywhere. What's more, there's probably fewer people who speak Spanish than in the "ethnic" part of most American cities these days.

I got off bus 8 at LeJune Road, which is also known as 42nd Avenue. This is a major business strip that runs north/south the length of the city just east of the airport. I turned the corner and waited at another bus stop in front of a Walgreen's that could have been in absolutely any American city. **[At the time Walgreen's was doing major expansion and remodeling, with the exact same design used for virtually all their stores.]** Before long a "J" bus arrived, and I used my last token to board it.

It was about a five-minute ride to the airport parking ramp, the same place I had first entered the Miami public transit system. I made my way to the departures level of the terminal and quickly checked in at a self-service machine. (There wasn't even an employee at the counter; I'm not sure what I would have done if I had luggage with me.) There was a **long** line at security, but before long an employee came by and announced that there was no line at Concourse C and that a passageway connected "C" right back to where we'd come out if we went through this security checkpoint.

I scurried over to Concourse C and was pleased to find the report was right; I was the first person in what ended up being a long line there. I went through quickly and had more than two hours to kill before my flight was scheduled to leave. I spent most of the

time wandering the concourses, walking past every single gate in the airport—many of them three or four times. I must tell you MIA is a **boring** airport. There's very little business in the terminals (unlike Minneapolis or O'Hare, which might as well be shopping malls). It's also a very strange airport, with lots of little side passageways that seem to lead to nowhere. It reminded me in negative ways of Sheremetievo Airport in Moscow. The most interesting thing in the airport was an art exhibit featuring drawings done by high school students. Some had an aviation theme, while others portrayed life in Miami—both good and bad aspects of it.

It was lunch time when I got back to the American Eagle departure area, and I decided to “go native” for lunch. I waited in a long line at a place called Café Versailles whose French name covered up the fact that they served Cuban cuisine. I had a classic Cuban sandwich (basically ham and roast pork with white cheese and garlic placed on a baguette and smashed with a panini press **I left out the obligatory pickle in that description**), a cup of Andean blackberry pulp (exactly what it says—and they also had other unusual flavors of fruit puree), and a “café cubano” (a tiny cup of syrupy espresso with almost equal parts coffee and sugar). Of the three only the sandwich was truly good (and it was definitely not worth its \$5.29 airport price tag), but I did have an interesting lunch.

The American Eagle lounge at MIA is downstairs, beneath the main concourse. They used to have that same set—up in Minneapolis, before they added the new “A” and “B” concourses that serve the little planes. **[It's weird to think of those concourses as new.]** There are about half a dozen doorways leading out to the tarmac, each guarded by a harried employee. About every five minutes they announce a departure, with boarding continuing for fifteen minutes or so. That means every gate is constantly either boarding, about to board, or just departed.

I still had about half an hour before I could expect them to call my flight, so I sat down in a chrome and black leatherette chair of the type they have at the Mason City airport. Next to me was a woman holding a Canadian passport with a carry-on that seemed as large as she was. I've noticed that particularly on these “regional jets” people often push the limits for carry-ons. They'll bring impossibly large items, knowing they will have to use check them at planeside when they board. With planeside checking, though, they can claim the bulky stuff right when they get off, instead of having to wait for the main baggage to be unloaded. It's a clever concept, though not one I'd probably have the guts to try myself.

Before long they announced that the flight to Memphis was overbooked and began asking for volunteers. I suppose I could have agreed and gotten yet another free trip, but the later flight they would have bumped me onto would have gotten into Memphis after the public transit there stopped running. While I certainly could have taken a cab to my hotel, I never really like the idea of arriving anywhere late at night. Moreover, I had a ticket to a ballgame in Memphis tonight and one of the things I really wanted to see in Memphis was free today only but would cost \$10 later in the week. So I just stayed put and let others try for the free tickets.

In the end nobody got a free ticket. They had no shows (something they seem to count on—though why you'd book a flight and not show, I don't know **[apparently it's very common for business people, and it also happens when people miss their connections due to delays on incoming flights]**), and it turned out the flight wasn't even full. In fact, I ended up on the side with two seats, with no one next to me.

When they called boarding, we all went through the door and waited out on the hot tarmac for a bus **[open air, which was strange]** to come and get us. One of my fellow passengers was a middle-aged woman who was apparently scared of flying, about whom I overheard the gate attendant telling the bus driver “she'll need assistance with the boarding process”. She clearly didn't want to board, and the stewardess all but lifted her on board and into her seat.

The scared woman ended up a row in front of me, on the side of the airplane with one seat. Behind her was an enormous black woman who had just returned from a cruise. Directly in front of me was a couple consisting of a middle-aged businessman from Miami and a peroxide bimbo from Slovakia he dangled on his arm. The woman spoke like Natasha on Rocky and Bullwinkle (I think everyone from Eastern Europe has the same accent), and her outfit basically consisted of a bra, a towel, and a lot of gaudy jewelry.

We took off uneventfully. Shortly after we were in the air, the scared woman asked if she could have a drink—meaning something with liquor, not the 7-Up everyone else was offered. The stewardess apologized that while beer and wine were usually available (for \$5 each) on this flight, there had been a catering mistake and that cart wasn't placed on board. That couple in front of me saved the day for the scared lady, though. The man reached into his white suit coat and pulled out about half a dozen of those single-serving bottles of rum. The stewardess informed him that while it was okay for him to have booze on the airplane, only she (the flight attendant) was allowed to pour it. She got some glasses, and the man shared the rum with the scared woman, his wife, and the elderly couple in front of them. He also offered it to the black lady, who said she didn't drink. Somehow I wasn't included in the little party, but that's probably just as well. The scared woman downed two of those little bottles, mixed with cranberry juice; that should have been enough to take her mind off the flight.

We got into Memphis precisely on time. (This is, after all “America's #1 on-time airport”.) I made a quick stop at the restroom and then followed signs for ground transportation. These led past baggage claim and out to a little drive by the parking ramp. There was a bench and a sign to indicate a bus stop, but not much else. Unlike in Miami, Memphis expected you to know what you were doing to take the bus. There was actually a limo parked where the buses were supposed to stop, so I couldn't be entirely sure where I should wait.

I had gone online and printed out a schedule for Memphis transit before leaving on this trip, so I knew a bus was supposed to show up in about twenty minutes. In about five minutes a bus came by, but it wasn't mine. What was weird, though, was that the other bus that stopped her wasn't due until 5 minutes **after** my bus—and both just come once an hour. My bus showed up a little more than

ten minutes after I arrived. Actually, I wasn't 100% certain it was the right bus (its sign still said "AIRPORT" when it arrived, and the driver seemed to speak only Black English), but since the only other bus that stopped here had already come and gone, I figured this had to be mine. Fortunately, I figured right.

The driver seemed very surprised anyone was boarding at the airport, and even more surprised that the person boarding would be a white man. (The whole time I was in Memphis, the only white faces I saw on transit were on the tourist line downtown.) He didn't even pause to leave at the scheduled time; he just set off for downtown ahead of schedule. With service scheduled just once an hour, I'd think they'd pay a bit more attention to the schedule.

I couldn't begin to tell you the route this bus followed. While I never much like taking buses, I don't mind it too much in places like Chicago where each bus basically follows a single street for most of its route. Most of L.A.'s and Miami's buses did that, too. I didn't take any buses in New York, and the main reason was that the routes there were a lot like the one this Memphis bus followed; they just meander all over the place, so people unfamiliar with the city have absolutely no clue where they are. We made at least half a dozen turns just leaving the airport, and we seemed to turn again each time we reached a major intersection. **[I just checked the Memphis Area Transit Authority website, and once out of the airport property, bus #2 follows Terminal Access Road, Winchester Road, Airways Boulevard, Democrat Road, Plough Boulevard, Airways Boulevard (again), East Parkway, Young Avenue, Union Street, McLean Boulevard, and Madison Street—and that's just to the point where I got off.]** Most of the route was through very residential areas, which seemed a bit strange to me, since I'd think they'd attract more business by running along the commercial streets. You get an idea of just how circuitous the route was from the fact that internet map services say the drive from the airport to downtown should be about fifteen minutes, but the bus takes about an hour to make that trip. The whole time I sat in the very back, feeling more than a bit conspicuous being both the only person who wasn't black and the only person with luggage of any sort.

About halfway from the airport to downtown the driver parked the bus right under a railroad overpass in the middle of a busy street. He left the emergency flashers on as he went into a nearby convenience store. He returned a few minutes later with an enormous tub of pop and some Ho-Hos, and we set off again. Perhaps this is the place he catches up with the schedule. On the other hand, maybe he just wanted a snack. **[My money's on the latter—and obviously he didn't have to constantly radio his position like the guy who drove the parking bus in Des Moines.]**

Miami's buses had nice electronic announcements at every major intersection. Here the driver would occasionally utter something unintelligible into the mike. It was also hard to see anything because the windows of the bus were covered over by an advertisement. Fortunately at one of the turns I could make out the tracks for the Madison Avenue trolley, which I knew would lead right to downtown. I pulled the cord, and a little ways ahead the bus stopped. I got off in the middle of a rather run-down business strip and made my way along an absolutely empty sidewalk to the trolley stop.

In addition to their skeletal bus system, Memphis operates a trolley service along three routes in and near downtown. The Main Street and Riverfront trolleys mostly shuttle tourists, while the Madison Avenue line connects downtown with the medical district east of there. Eventually this line will be extended to the airport, where it will serve passengers and also workers in the terminals and the Federal Express hub located there. When the extension is complete, they'll replace the historic trolley cars they now use with modern light rail vehicles, which will make for a much faster trip. I never saw any of the trolleys carrying much of any passengers, and my first ride was no exception. I boarded the Madison Avenue trolley at the end of the line, and only one other passenger boarded in the two mile stretch between there and downtown. Perhaps when they extend the line so it actually goes somewhere, people might actually take the trolley. **[Apparently the plans for an extension to the airport have since been dropped or at least put on indefinite hold. Nothing has happened in Memphis transit in the past six years, except that several bus lines have been cut and service has been even further reduced on the remaining ones. The reference to light rail on the MATA website was last updated in 2008.]**

I told the driver (a young black woman) that I wanted a day pass, that is a pass that would be good for riding any of the trolleys (but not any buses, which have a completely different fare structure) all day. It turned out that today this really wasn't a good buy, but the \$3 price tag hardly broke me. She had me put my money in a fare box at the center of the car, and she searched through some bags looking for a pass. She never did find one, but eventually she was able to flag down a trolley heading the opposite direction and get a pass from that car's driver.

The Madison Avenue trolley runs up and down hills east of downtown Memphis. Just west of the skuzzy business district where I had boarded is the Medical District, which until quite recently was home to several major hospitals. Two of these recently closed in mergers, and the largest remaining facility (the famous St. Jude's Children's Hospital) is actually quite a ways from the trolley. It was weird passing the empty shells of what used to be major institutions. **[I'm sure there must be nice areas in the city, but most of what I saw in Memphis made it look like one of the most God-forsaken places in America.]** West of the medical district there is a rather upscale residential area that consists of newly constructed apartments built to look like old warehouses. **[It seems like almost every new ballpark is built in a similar neighborhood.]** In the heart of this area is the ballpark I would be visiting tonight. Just west of there the line terminates in the heart of this rather dilapidated old river town.

The trolley driver could tell quite easily that I was a tourist, so when we reached the end of the line, she asked me what hotel I was headed for. I said the Sleep Inn, and she told me to transfer to the Main Street trolley and gave vague directions from there. I knew from the hotel's website that the Main Street trolley was supposed to stop right outside the hotel, so that seemed right. I followed her directions and ended up going past my destination, ending up at a Comfort Inn (same chain, but different hotel) north of where I wanted to be. I walked back down Main Street all the way to Madison, never noticing a Sleep Inn anywhere. Then I got out the hotel

map I had printed out and noted the cross street. What they didn't say was that the entrance to the hotel was actually on that cross street; it was only a back door that faced onto Main (even though Main was the hotel's address). I eventually found it and went inside.

A rather unhelpful woman at the desk acknowledged that I had a reservation, but she told me I couldn't check in because there were no rooms available. It was after 3pm now, well past their designated check-in time. I asked if she could assign a different type of room or if I could even leave my bags and come back when the one I had reserved was available, but somehow both of those were impossible too. **[Not allowing me to leave my bag left an especially bad impression.]** She suggested I have coffee while I waited for my room to be made up. I got a cup from the breakfast bar, found the most prominent place I could to sit, and proceeded to drink it while glaring at her. I glared at her for about half an hour, and eventually she contacted the maid. It wouldn't surprise me if the room had actually been ready for some time, but the maid just hadn't turned in her list of completed rooms. Seconds after getting the OK from the maid, I was checked in. I quickly made my way up to a tiny, but pleasant room **[very standard for an older Sleep Inn]** on the second floor that overlooked the trolley stop outside.

I left my bag and almost immediately set out again. As I walked out the back door of the hotel I just missed a southbound trolley, so I ended up walking south about a mile to my destination, the National Civil Rights Museum. This museum is located in and around the old Lorraine Motel, where Martin Luther King was shot. Admission is free here on Monday afternoons, so I was able to experience a top-notch museum without spending a dime.

The museum has several galleries that do a good job of tracing the complete history of civil rights. They don't just focus on black Americans, but other minority groups and the rights of people around the world. Among the more interesting exhibits was a replica of the bus where Rosa Parks sat all those years ago. There's a statue of Parks inside the bus, so you can literally go in and sit down next to her.

Perhaps most moving is the display inside the motel itself. They have the room where King stayed restored as it would have been the day he died—right down to toiletries on the counter and a tray with items on it from a room service dinner. It looks, of course, like a motel room. In fact, it looks a lot like the rooms in many Super 8's. There was certainly nothing luxurious about the place (it was not nearly so nice as any of the hotels where I was staying on this trip), but it was clean and pleasant. Segregation had been outlawed at the time Dr. King stayed here, but he chose this motel because it was built by blacks in the days when black people couldn't stay at the nicer downtown hotels and it was still operated by a black family in 1968.



Lorraine Motel – National Civil Rights Museum

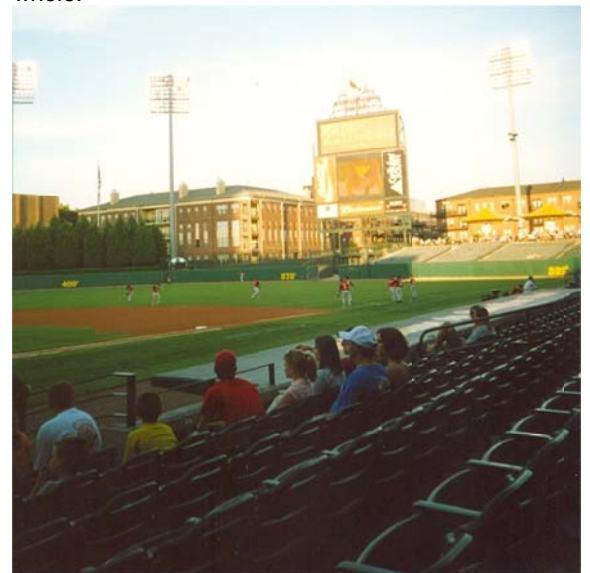
Outside the place looks a lot like any other old motel. The doors (which face right out onto the parking lot) are painted the same aqua color you'd see in old Motel 6's all over America. There's a big '60s style sign of the type you might expect at any ma 'n' pa motel. Just two things tell you there's something else here. First, the parking lot is filled with period cars. More important, they've got a wreath hanging from the balcony where Dr. King was shot, a fitting memorial in an unusual location.

Across the street from the Lorraine they've also restored the boarding house where James Earl Ray was staying at the time of the killing and from which the fatal shot was apparently fired. A fascinating gallery in the boarding house discusses the many conspiracy theories that have been put forward with regard to the assassination, dwelling most on the possibility the FBI might have been involved. While they don't entirely discount any of the theories, they note that there have been dozens of investigations in this case, starting in the '60s and continuing to the present day. None of them has been able to uncover anything more than the shakiest shreds of evidence that anyone other than James Earl Ray was involved in the shooting.

I once heard Walter Cronkite discussing both the murders of both Dr. King and John Kennedy and the many conspiracy theories that have been proposed in both cases. Cronkite summed it up by saying "secrets that big just aren't that easy to keep". If anyone else were involved in either of the cases, he noted, surely someone would have talked at some point in the last forty years. Given that no one has, America's most trusted man is inclined to accept the official verdicts in both cases—and so am I.



LEFT: King memorial at Lorraine Motel



RIGHT: Autozone Park – Memphis, Tennessee

I took the Main Street trolley back to the hotel and showered. Then I took the Madison Avenue trolley eastward to Autozone Park, the home of AAA baseball's Memphis Redbirds. The trolley stops right outside the park, but unfortunately there isn't an entrance anywhere remotely nearby **[which is stupid planning, if you ask me]**. I had to circle three sides of the place before I finally found a gate I could use.

Inside the park is really quite nice, a smaller version of the nice "retro-parks" that are proliferating in all the big league towns. They also have an excellent variety of food. In addition to a hot dog, I had an enormous serving of barbecue nachos. This strange product combines tortilla chips and spicy cheese with shredded meat and barbecue sauce. It's an odd combination of flavors, but they went surprisingly well together. The only problem was that it's all but impossible to eat as finger food and the stand serving it had no forks. I made do, though, and finished every bite. **[I've since had the same dish at the ballpark in Omaha, and I enjoyed it there as well.]**

The rather small crowd arrived late and left early. For most of the game I had an entire row to myself. Those people who were here didn't seem very into the game. Instead they had come primarily to drink cup after enormous cup of beer. I can't say I really blamed the people who didn't pay close attention to the playing field. This was really a rather dull game. Had Brad been in AAA I'd have at least had some interest in following how he was doing. Tonight I did pay attention to his friends (in particular Chris Barnwell,

Outside the National Civil Rights Museum a lone woman was sitting under an umbrella quietly protesting and calling for visitors to boycott the museum. Her sign complained that millions of dollars had been spent on the James Earl Ray exhibit (which apparently had just opened), but "there's nothing for the poor". I'm not sure why a museum should be expected to give anything to the poor. Presumably it's a non-profit organization itself, and I'm sure its existence has provided jobs for local people who otherwise might be without them. I pondered just what the woman's problem with the place was as I made my way back to a nearby trolley stop.

It was interesting that the crowd at the museum was quite multiracial, one of the few places in Memphis where that was true. Memphis is an overwhelmingly black city. They're trying hard to restore its downtown area as a place suburban and visiting whites can spend their money, but those whites don't stop on their way downtown, and the local blacks don't go downtown except to work in service jobs. The civil rights museum attracts tourists of all races, and it was good to see integration at work there—if not in the city as a whole.

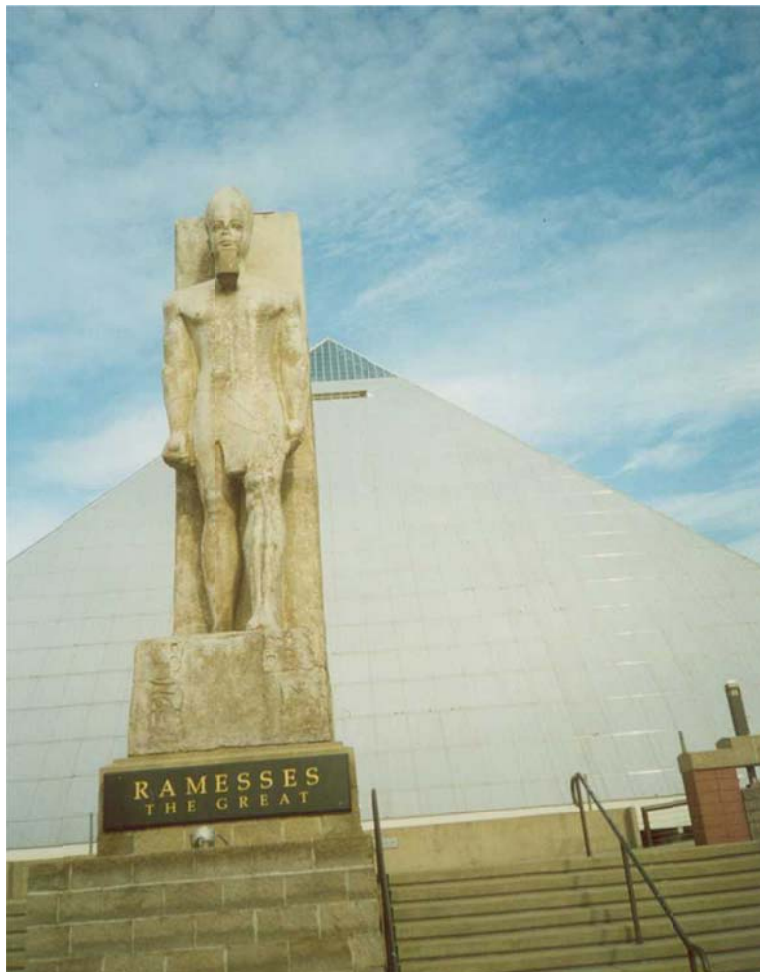
one of Brad's best friends who I've actually met personally and who I've followed since he and Brad played together in Beloit **[he's now with the Arizona Diamondbacks organization]**), but it still wasn't a very interesting game.

In addition to "Barney", I also noted the at-bats of Prince Fielder, the "bonus baby" who jumped over Brad to become the Brewers' top prospect at first base. I must say I was secretly happy that Prince had a pathetic game tonight, swinging at air all night long and missing a catch that should have been an easy out. I don't really wish ill to Prince, but I'd a lot rather see someone I know and like succeed. It's annoying that Brad moved to left field to make room for Prince, only to have the Brewers trade for an established left fielder, Nelson Cruz. Cruz was playing well for Nashville tonight, which didn't make it very promising that Brad would be called back to AAA any time soon. (Actually Brad was recalled fairly soon after this game, filling a spot created by Prince Fielder's promotion to the big leagues. He finished the season with Nashville, the team that went on to win the Pacific Coast League championship. He'll probably start in Nashville next year, but I'll be surprised if he doesn't spend at least a little time in the majors by fall.) **[Brad did make it to "the show" in Milwaukee, but he didn't perform very well there. The Brewers released him, and he has since been with the Seattle Mariners and Texas Rangers organizations. Nelson Cruz is also with the Rangers. He's mostly a big league outfielder, but I saw him on a AAA rehab assignment when I was down in Texas visiting Brad a month ago. Prince Fielder has continued to be the Brewers full-time first baseman. I still can't say that I like the guy, but I can't argue that he doesn't deserve his job.]**

I chose to leave at the seventh inning stretch. It amused me to hear them play the Budweiser song ("Here Comes the King") at the stretch. This is a Cardinals affiliate, though, so I suppose it's not unlike playing "Roll Out the Barrel" in Beloit (...which, by the way, makes me wonder if they still do that now that the Snappers are affiliated with the Twins).

There was no trolley anywhere in sight on Madison Avenue, so I walked back to the hotel. While I got there safely, I must say that downtown Memphis was definitely not a place I felt comfortable at night. It's very rough, and I felt more than a little uncomfortable. **[It's honestly just about the creepiest place I've ever been at night.]** I was very glad to get back to the Sleep Inn, where I could just peer out at it from my window rather than experiencing the place up close and personal.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 16 → MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE



The Pyramid – Memphis, Tennessee

Today I spent a leisurely day in Memphis. I got up in slow motion and just sort of wandered from place to place. There's not a lot of "must see" attractions here (save Graceland, which was far pricier than I wanted to pay), but I had a pleasant day nonetheless.

Breakfast at the Sleep Inn was minimal. Besides the bagel bar you'd find at almost every motel these days, they had frozen microwave pancakes—not something I cared to sample **[though probably better than the do-it-yourself waffles that have spread to almost every other hotel]**.

I began my day by walking north along Main Street, mostly just to see what was there. The back of my hotel faced out onto Court Square. This is a nicely landscaped little park that would be lovely if it weren't overrun by beggars. North of there are a number of government buildings that date to the '40s and '50s. They have very little personality, but they are among the tallest buildings in a fairly low-rise city. In front of city hall is an interesting little plaza with numerous triangle-shaped fountains that seem to come on randomly. North of there is the Memphis Convention Center and a Marriott Hotel, which are connected by the city's only skywalk. Beyond there is the so-called North Main Arts District—one of those places that is trying to gentrify, but hasn't made it yet. A couple of coffee bars and an expensive Italian restaurant don't do much to rescue a neighborhood that's mostly boarded up warehouses and parking lots surrounded by razor wire.

[I've talked with Brad about the various places he's played, and while we differ in our opinions of New Orleans (I love it; he hates it), we both agree that Memphis is just about our least favorite city in America. Brad ranked it right up there with Victorville, California, where ballplayers were mugged in their hotel parking lot. They seem to have tried several times to rescue the place and make it tourist-friendly, but little of what they've done seems to have much effect. It's just "lipstick on a pig" as the Southern expression goes.]

North Main was an obvious place to turn back, since beyond there was public housing. I walked back to the trolley stop by the convention center and caught the next car. This was part of the Riverside line. The Riverside streetcar makes a counterclockwise loop, heading north on Main Street, turning westward in the “arts district”, and then heading on an old railroad right-of-way along the Mississippi. South of downtown (near the Memphis Amtrak station), it turns back east and heads back up Main Street. The Main Street trolley provides both northbound and southbound service on Main, so there are always twice as many cars headed north as south.

I again tried to buy a day pass, and once again I had a driver who had none in his vehicle. **[That really is bizarre; you'd think they'd stock them at the beginning of each shift.]** He stopped a southbound Main Street car and got one for me. You'd think on a touristy route like this that such passes would be standard. The trolley turned west next to the main bus mixmaster and squeezed into an impossibly small passage next to a drive-through bank. We then went rapidly downhill and made a tight turn in front of the parking lot of the Pyramid. This building, a glass-fronted structure shaped to honor that other place called Memphis is a sports arena but also hosts conventions and exhibitions. No one would ever confuse it with a historic structure; instead it looks a lot like the Luxor hotel in Las Vegas.

I got off the trolley in front of the Amtrak station, where it lays up to catch up with the schedule (unlike the bus I'd taken earlier). We would have about a ten-minute wait, so it seemed an appropriate place to get off. I walked back west through a truly gentrified area of warehouses and factories that had been converted to loft apartments and expensive shops. This is one of the few places in Memphis where white people live, and just about the only place black people don't live. It's not that they are specifically segregated away, but the price (studios starting at \$1,750/month) would tend to exclude most people of any race. I wondered just what the people who live here did to pay their rent, since today they didn't seem to be doing much of anything. Most of them seemed to be walking their dogs or sitting in coffee bars sipping lattes and munching on scones.

Beyond the enclave of gentrification lies the mighty Mississippi, which I found much more interesting. They have two nice trails along the river, one in the floodplain right next to the river (actually well above water level in this drought year) and the other about halfway up the bluff. I walked at riverside about halfway back to the Pyramid then went up to the other path and walked back. The riverfront here used to be industrial, but has been restored to parkland. It's not really beautiful and certainly not spectacular, but it is rather pleasant. While it was beastly hot, I still had a nice walk. **[MANY other cities have better waterfront trails, but this is at least a step in the right direction.]**



Mississippi River waterfront – Memphis, Tennessee

I made my way back to the Amtrak station, but there was no trolley anywhere in sight, so I headed east to Main Street and waited a few blocks north, just in front of the civil rights museum. Before long a Main Street Trolley pulled up, and I took that car back to the hotel.

It was already late morning, but my room was not made up. Indeed, it appeared there weren't any maids anywhere in the building yet. What there were was baseball players. I was surprised to find that this was actually the visiting team hotel for Autozone Park. That wasn't why I chose the place (and if Brad were playing and I knew it was the team hotel, I'd have probably avoided it). It is the level of hotel the AAA players stay in—nice, but not really luxurious—and it would be quite convenient to the ballpark. I recognized Steve Scarborough and Trent Durrington (one of the few baseball players to hail from Australia) who were getting ice as I made my way to my room. I've never met either of them personally, and they wouldn't know me from Adam, so I didn't say anything to them. It was sort of fun to know the guys were staying there, though. **[A Sleep Inn would definitely be toward the low end of accommodations for a AAA team. The hotels get better as players make their way through the ranks. They probably chose it because the hotel is very near the ballpark. In Des Moines the visiting team hotel is the downtown Embassy Suites. It's a MUCH nicer hotel than this Sleep Inn, but its primary advantage to a baseball team is its proximity to Principal Park. The players literally walk from the hotel to the ballpark.]**

As I had done so often in Miami, I showered and dried off my sweaty clothes—this time using both the iron and the hair dryer. Then I set off again. I walked down to Madison Street and caught a trolley eastbound to Cleveland Avenue. The corner of Cleveland and Madison was less than promising (mostly home to the neighborhood unemployment office), but two blocks south of there was a business strip with a wide variety of choices for lunch. I chose Krystal, the southern institution that's basically a knock-off of White Castle. Then I redeemed a bit more of the Garrigan scrip for dessert at a nearby Burger King. (This time the counter girl didn't even blink at accepting gift certificates.) I walked about a mile westward down the strip to Pauline Avenue and then headed back north to the trolley. I went back to the hotel to dry off again, surprised to find that there were still no maids anywhere around.

I caught a glimpse of the Nashville Sounds team bus leaving for the park as I headed back out around 2pm. (That's a pretty typical departure time for a 7:00 game; baseball is more of a full-time job than most people think.) I caught the Main Street trolley and headed south to Peabody Place, which is right in the heart of "tourist central" for Memphis. Named after the historic Peabody Hotel, the main thing around here these days is a snooty mall with remarkably little in it. I actually spent quite a bit of money here, entirely on books. They had a Tower Records store here that mostly sold music and movies, but had a surprisingly interesting book selection.

I also tried to get a shopping bag. As I always do, I had acquired more stuff than would comfortably fit in my carry-on. They had sturdy plastic shopping bags for sale from a machine for \$.50 each. I put in two quarters, but the machine wouldn't unlock, so I guess I just made the proprietors of Peabody Place four bits richer.



Beale Street in downtown Memphis

Just south of Peabody Place is Beale Street, supposedly the birthplace of the blues **[though many would argue that the genre came to Memphis from the Delta area of northern Mississippi]**. They've really developed this in recent years. I remember stopping in Memphis on my first trip south back in 1990. At that time Beale Street was absolutely dead by day and looked like it would probably be rather creepy at night (not unlike most of the rest of Memphis). Now it's got a Hard Rock Café and all the other accoutrements of tourist destinations everywhere. Beale Street caters to families by day and wealthy young people by night. It was crawling with bratty children this afternoon. I snapped a couple of obligatory pictures and made my way back to the trolley.

I next took the Madison trolley to the end of the line and then walked quite a ways east of there. The neighborhood here reminded me a lot of residential New York. It looked trashy, but probably wasn't really all that bad. It was basically a middle class black urban neighborhood. I eventually made my way to a Piggly Wiggly supermarket that served the area. I picked up several bags of Community Coffee, the New Orleans chicory blend I learned to love in my grad school days. The coffee costs a fortune in the French Quarter, but it's just the everyday coffee everybody drinks in Louisiana, Mississippi, and the other nearby states (including Tennessee). The same pound bag that goes for \$8 on Bourbon Street costs about \$3.50 at Piggly Wiggly. (As a side note, after Hurricane Katrina diaspora Community started selling their product in the northern states. I saw it for sale at a Jewel store in Chicago after Thanksgiving—priced higher than in Memphis but lower than the New Orleans tourist prices.)

When I got back to the hotel there was finally a maid in my hallway, though she hadn't done anything with my room yet. I felt like suggesting to her that she start at my end of the hall, since the baseball players would probably not be back until midnight. She had her system, though, and I certainly wasn't going to interfere.

After drying off yet again (the temperature supposedly reached 102° this afternoon), I set off walking once more. I walked up to the Civic Center area (those government buildings), where probably half a dozen TV trucks were parked among the triangular fountains. Reporters were in front of those trucks, recording stories for their evening newscasts. I may have been in the background of a shot as I stood there waiting for the trolley. The reporters were there to cover an announcement the mayor was making that the city and county (which are apparently the same jurisdiction in Memphis) were about to run out of money. I gather from news articles that this is a fairly common occurrence in Memphis. They were dealing with it this time by giving all employees an unpaid three-day holiday later this month **[something that has since happened more than once to Iowa government employees]**. Fortunately I'd be well out of town before that happened.



Riverfront Trolley – Memphis

casinos would be about half an hour south in Tunica, Mississippi. That didn't phase the couple, and I was able to give them very specific directions to Tunica, having driven between there and Memphis several times before (though never for the purpose of gambling—indeed the casinos didn't even exist until after my days in Mississippi were over). **[They've since opened a freeway down to Tunica.]**

I got off back at Peabody Place and spent a while walking around the east end of downtown Memphis. This area is a bit more interesting than Main Street, but still not really anything special. It reminded me of what downtown Burlington was thirty years ago. It's pretty sad when a city of half a million has the same downtown as a city of 30,000. **[That's actually pretty typical in the South. What is unusual about Memphis is that it's an old city, rather than a collection of suburban neighborhoods with no real city. I have no idea why downtown Memphis doesn't have the type of downtown that St. Louis or New Orleans (similarly sized places up and down the river) do.]**

I got back to the hotel and was pleased to find my room was finally done. I then set off one more time, this time hoping to get a bag into which I could expand my stuff. There were only two stores in all of downtown that were very promising. I first tried Family Dollar (that Family Dollar is the only real department store in downtown Memphis tells you something). They had no luggage or backpacks there, but I did find a bath towel I liked that was being closed out for \$1.50. **[That towel—beige with a palm tree design—remains one of my favorites to this day.]** Next I went to an old, grungy Walgreen's. Even the inner city Chicago stores I'd been to didn't have quite the feel of this particular Walgreen's. It had the "charm" (i.e. missing tile, warped floors, peeling paint, etc.) of the old Hoaglin's variety store in Mt. Pleasant—which has now been closed for more than a quarter century. The aisles were crammed more

I took a Riverfront trolley to a stop by a state welcome center just south of the Pyramid. The welcome center was closed (apparently part of a state fiscal crisis unrelated to the local money problems), but the area around it was interesting nonetheless. They have an aerial tramway that leads from here to Mud Island, a combination residential area and amusement park in the middle of the river. I passed on the pricey tram ride but did have some more fun exploring the waterfront.

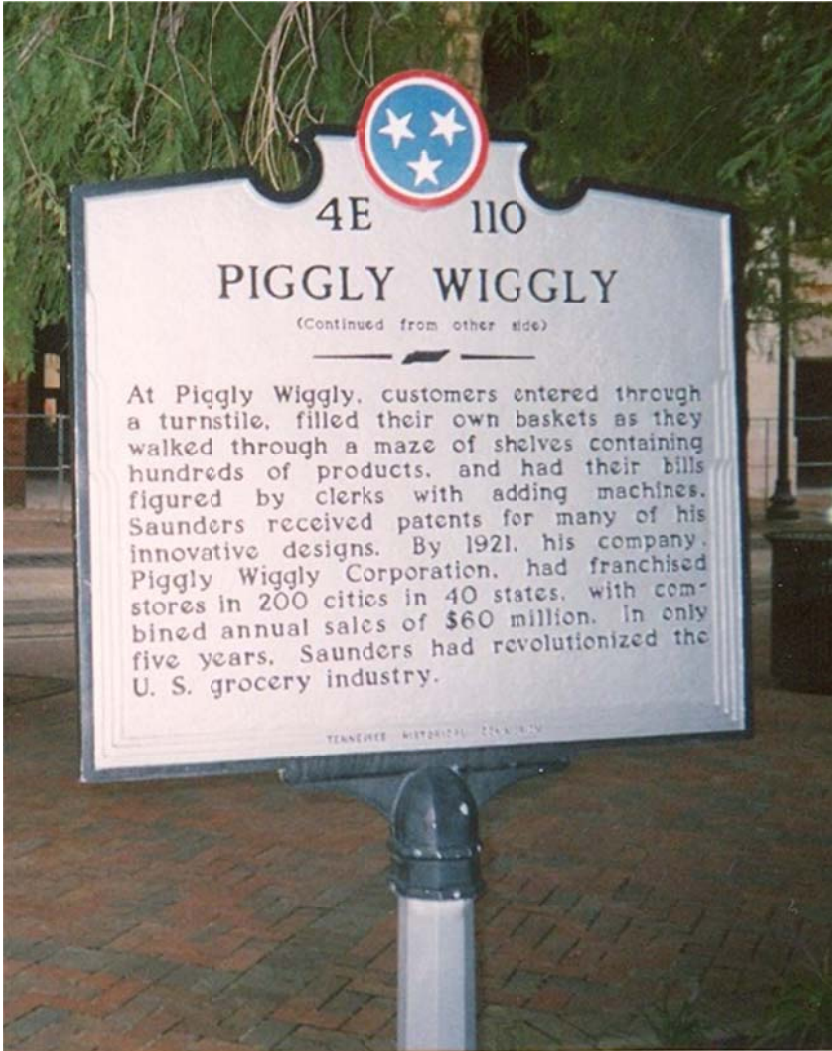
After hiking some more I caught another trolley. The only other passengers were an elderly couple that was asking directions to various points of interest. The driver didn't seem terribly informed about anything, and when I answered the couple's questions, they thought I was a local. (I doubt anyone local ever takes the Riverfront trolley.) One of the things they were trying to find were casinos. The driver was able to confirm what I was pretty certain of: there aren't any casinos in Memphis. In fact the nearest

tightly than Family Dollar, and there were security cameras everywhere. They did, however, have quite a large selection of luggage. I selected what was basically a soft-sided briefcase that fit my purposes nicely. **[The strap on this bag broke almost immediately, rendering it virtually unusable.]**

I left my purchases back at the hotel and then took the trolley one more time, heading back to the Krystal on Cleveland. On the way back the only other passenger was an elderly woman who talked endlessly with the driver about how unsafe the neighborhood was. While I never personally had any problems, I doubt she's exaggerating much. It was nearly dark when I got back to the hotel, and I was more than happy to just stay in my room for the night.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 17 →

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE TO ALGONA, IOWA



Piggly Wiggly historical Marker – Memphis, Tennessee

traced the route I had taken coming into Memphis ("roughly" because many of the streets here are one-ways) and ended up back at the airport.

I checked in and checked my luggage in no time, and there was no line at all at security. Once I was in the secure part of MEM, I still had four hours to kill. I spent some of the time reading and some of it walking literally every concourse in the airport. I was amazed at just how deserted this enormous airport was. They seem to schedule the departures in waves here, and I was definitely between waves. Every gate on every concourse had a flight scheduled, but every one of them left sometime between 1 and 3pm. At 10am there was absolutely nothing going on here. It's really not a boring airport, though. They have a good variety of shops and restaurants, and things are mostly pretty user-friendly. I'd definitely rank MEM ahead of Miami's airport. **[Apparently MIA has been remodeled since my trip there. It would be interesting to head back to Miami and see both the airport and the city.]**

I had a cinnamon roll and coffee from a stand next to Gate C-5, the gate from which my flight was scheduled to leave. I finished the T-shirt book and read a large part of a linguistics book (a sequel to *The Story of English* **[which was much duller than the**

I intended to sleep in this morning, so—needless to say—I was up quite early. The breakfast was identical to yesterday's uninspired offerings, so I just had some coffee and then made a brief walk around the neighborhood. I was intrigued to see a state historical marker sign just north of my hotel that marked the spot of the very first Piggly Wiggly store, which is noteworthy not just in that chain's history, but also because it was the first self-service grocery store anywhere. Given the street layout and the location of that sign, at least part of the Sleep Inn (including my room) was almost certainly built on the original Piggly Wiggly lot.

While it was hours before my flight back to Des Moines would leave, there was nothing at all to keep me in downtown Memphis. I figured I might as well make my way to the airport. I walked west on the side street onto which the Sleep Inn faced to its corner at Front Street. I waited at a bus stop as several buses I didn't want passed and eventually boarded Bus 2-A, whose destination read "AIRPORT".

This bus had no advertising on its windows, so it was a lot easier to see the route we were taking. The bus first headed north on Front Street, past the back end of the convention center. A little ways south of the Pyramid we turned east and headed for North End station, the big bus mixmaster I had walked past yesterday. We then wandered through the northeast part of downtown, whose most significant feature appeared to be the Shelby County Jail. A long line of people waited out front at the visitors' entrance. We then passed the enormous St. Jude's Hospital complex and headed south through the medical district. We made our way back to Madison Street, where I saw the easternmost trolley station where I had left the bus the other day. Then we roughly re-

Ti-shirt book] I had picked up at Tower Records. **[A much more interesting book that I also picked up at the Memphis Tower Records was José Canseco's tell-all on steroids in baseball. I wouldn't get around to reading that until later, though.]** I also read the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* almost in its entirety—all before lunchtime. My lunch was at an Italian restaurant in the terminal, where I had some very spicy lasagna and what they called “Italian wedding soup” (delicious broth with tiny **[ball-shaped]** pieces of pasta in it). **[I'd never heard of this before, but in recent years it seems to be everywhere. I've had it at Panera and similar places, and I've even seen canned Italian wedding soup from Campbell's.]** I then went back to the gate and read some more of the linguistics book.

Eventually it was time for the flight to board. I hate to say it, but you could tell the crowd on this flight was going to Iowa. I'm very proud of my state, but there was something very “Iowa” about the dumpy overweight middle-aged white people on this plane. I, of course, was one of them, so I guess I was on the correct flight.

The flight was uneventful. We landed in Des Moines early but had to wait for another plane to leave Northwest's only gate at the airport. I made my way to baggage claim and was pleased to find my bag was the very first one on the carousel. **[I'm positive that's the only time that's happened.]** I then took the bus back to the remote parking lot. The driver asked me “Where are you parked?”, a question I was not prepared to answer. I knew where I was in relation to where the original driver had picked me up, but not in relation to where we were when this guy asked me. Not really knowing how to respond, I said “this will be fine”, left the bus, and then proceeded to bumble around in the parking lot for quite a while before finally finding my car.

Miracle of miracles, my car started right up. Apparently it hadn't rained much after that first day. (The moisture problem was fixed shortly after this trip. It had a different starting problem the weekend before I'm writing this, but hopefully that's also fixed now.) I had an uneventful ride home and quickly went off to bed—since tomorrow I'd be getting back into the groove of another busy school year.