

Aging Lifestyles: Riding the rails once more

by Joe_Volz

Once there was a time when the best way to travel was by train. As the late great poet, Edna St. Vincent Millay, put it, "There isn't a train I wouldn't take."

But the war, with its technological advances, changed so many things, including the way we traveled in peacetime. The airplane, which could get you there much faster, took a lot of business away from the railroads. And President Eisenhower poured millions into a national defense highway system bypassing cities with superhighways.

The railroad we loved so much as kids became an endangered species as we worshipped speed and convenience.

But modern technology was not quite the savior we envisioned. Airplanes are jammed. More and more seats make planes uncomfortable and snow, rain and millions of other things can cause delays. Highways, particularly on each coast, are crumbling â€” causing inordinate delays as construction crews encroach on heavily trafficked roads. A new word has entered our lexicon: gridlock.

But guess which mode of transportation doesn't suffer any of these problems? That's right, railroads. That is if they haven't been put out of service.

Recently, we decided to take a three-hour trip from Washington, D.C., to Williamsburg, Va., by train for our vacation. We could relax by reading or napping. There was more legroom in the modern cars than in a plane or an auto. And there were no delays. We just boarded the Amtrak train at Union Station in Washington, D.C., and left on time.

Plus, we got a senior discount. Try asking the guy at the gas station for a senior discount.

There weren't too many seniors aboard. Maybe they are still grieving for the old days. But the train was packed with college kids who know a bargain when they see it. The train didn't have a fancy dining car with linen table covers, an on-board chef or waiters â€” just a cafe car with microwaveable snacks. Well, airlines don't serve food at all anymore.

The Williamsburg station was in the center of town, a short cab ride to our hotel, the Kingsmill Resort that overlooked the James River. But there was one unintended result of our trip by train. We didn't have a car, so

we never did bother to drive into Williamsburg.

What for? We had visited Colonial Williamsburg many times before and Kingsmill had every needed amenity within walking distance. That included four golf courses, tennis courts, indoor and outdoor pools, a hot tub and masseuses who were just remarkable. Not to mention a number of restaurants. Maybe we missed the peanut soup in Colonial Williamsburg, but so what?

You kind of wonder if the course of American history would have been altered if the resort had been here in Colonial times. If Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry had spent some time out at Kingsmill in the hot tub or getting regular massages, their lust for revolution may have cooled a bit.

Who would have wanted to take a long stagecoach to Philly over rutty roads when that hot tub beckoned?

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