

Sweet and Sour

By Zi Graves

San Francisco, California
 Anyone, especially an aging grandmother, who can't walk without limping, due to heel spurs, or can't walk a straight line without staggering, or read signs and instructions posted ten feet above her head without assistance, should realize age has taken its toll and she should never ever try traveling, especially flying, without an able escort. Thanks to Chad and Angie, I had two wonderful escorts to take care of that problem when we went to my grandson, Deno's wedding in Oakland, California last week.

The problem of needing assistance began when we arrived at the Greater Cincinnati Airport and began looking for the attendant with a wheelchair. Chad had asked for it. That once familiar airport to me has gone modern and joined the ranks of, "bigger must be better, so we will expand and change things about so people will have to search for the miles of their choice." They thought I would know it well for it was the one I had used for years. That is I did before all of the changes had taken place. Now there were no ticket nor information windows to be seen nor lunch counter or gift shop close by. I felt lost and suddenly old and tired from the miles we seemed to be walking while hunting for the familiar sign of Delta Airlines where a wheelchair should be waiting for me. Then the sign above the escalators caught our eye, it said DELTA. Since I couldn't ride on them we looked for and found the elevator. Sure enough Delta Airline in big letters was above a window and all the things we had missed on the first floor, such as candy, gift shops and snack bar were lining the walls. Also a wheelchair with an attendant was waiting for us. After placing some of the luggage on the chair with me she guided us to the gate where we would be boarding our plane, which was the last one on that long concourse, that seemed to me to be at least a mile long and I knew for sure then that I could not have walked it. Angie and Chad had been carrying all the luggage so I am sure they were glad it a minute before boarding time. Luckily, because I was being escorted, they were allowed to board early to avoid the push and shove of other passengers as they filed by seeking their seat. Our seat was above the wings, the seat was heavily overcast, therefore since we couldn't see neither earth nor sky we settled down to reading and talking.

The five hour flight flew by quickly and there we were, in San Francisco, California. Our hiking down the long corridors in Cincinnati was just a warm up for what we were in for now. And right now let me tell you all a little secret, (any time you are flying into a strange or big airport arrange ahead for a wheelchair to meet you at the entrance, and exit from the plane.) Those guys or dolls, know where to go and how to get around, they can get a wheelchair through a swarm of people quicker than a mouse, (unless a woman saw the mouse first and caught a rat.) An attractive young woman with wheelchair in tow was waiting for us as we reached the exit and told me proudly as she wheeled me to get the luggage she was going to school and learning the English language. No wonder they are so trim and agile, I'm sure she must have wheeled me a couple of miles to pick up the luggage, then that far again to get the shuttle that took us to the rental garage. Once again we had to wait a good half hour while Chad did the paperwork to rent a car. Three hours later we were at our motel, The Best Western, in Oakland.

Judy had already arrived and soon found us with my new roommate, Jody Arroyo, in tow.

At 5:00 p.m. Saturday, August 19, 2000, (Deno) Konstantin Prokos and Christina Chiacios, made their vows to each other of, "I will be true with tender loving care till death do us part." In a secluded area of Merrit Lake Park, with nature's own decoration of foliage and flowers surrounding the wedding, the quiet beauty of Lake Merrit facing them. This was preceded with dinner the night before for the attendants and selected members of the family.

Following the ceremony the typical feast of their Grecian heritage was spread in the community room at the park. Both Deno and Christina's fathers were second generation Greek Citizens and both mothers born in the south. Deno's mother in Ohio and Christina's in Tennessee. Their heritage also calls for plenty of toasting to the bride and groom with champagne, so each table was supplied with a bottle, along with two bottles of wine of one's choice. Then the speeches and fun began. Mos, the best man, kept the guests in stitches as he expounded, and often magnified Deno's shortcomings as a classmate and friend he had grown up with. This was followed by his brothers, Deno's uncle and Godfather, filling in the things Mos had left out along with his pride in this special

Godchild. Christa's father did the honors for his daughter so, of course she had no faults and was the perfect daughter. He too was a good speaker. Needless to say they were all good speakers and the audience got their fill of laughter at the expense of the bride and groom.

The bride and groom opened the dance floor with a beautiful dance before inviting all the guests to join in a free for all. Christa's close friend and one of the attendants even coasted me onto the dance floor for the first time in my life. (I heard it whispered around I was the queen of the ball.) Hmmm, I kinda liked it. Deno's best man, Mos, even announced to the full house he would marry Deno's grandma if he wasn't already married to his beautiful young wife, Lisa.

That night all my grandchildren were present. That included my youngest granddaughter, Christina. Ann was an attendant, Chad and Angie were with me and Birch arrived that morning from West Virginia. And of course Judy and Geoff were there. I missed the presence of my other two kids, Polly and Chuck, and Helen, but as it so often happens circumstances beyond our control interferes with our desires. Polly is a teacher and had to be in school, Helen has begun her fight against cancer and even though their hearts and minds were there presence had to be elsewhere.

Later I will tell more about my tours and ferry excursion, but while I am on the subject of people at the wedding I thought I would tell about the beauty of lasting friendships.

A few days before I was to leave for the wedding I got cold feet and wanted to stay home. I was afraid I wouldn't remember anyone and would be embarrassed by my lack of memory and my recent lack of confidence in ability to communicate to people whose name I had forgotten, and be able to talk with those I only slightly remembered. This proved untrue as each friend of Deno's, boys I hadn't seen since they were little kids running in and out of Judy's home to play in the rec room eating anything in sight, and always polite as they entered or left. None of them ever failed, as I remember it, to speak as they entered the room and say goodnight as they left. I soon found out they had not lost their friendliness nor manners. Five of those men in Deno's wedding party was one of those little boys. All have gone to college and are now established in careers. I can't name them all, but they are honorable ones.

The rest of the guests at the dinner are newer friends but the same attributes of loyalty, friendliness, sincerity and politeness, that made his boyhood friends come to his wedding even though they all, except Ben, live in distant places and had to fly in. The other thing that impressed me was the diversity of their backgrounds. It was truly wonderful to see young men of different nationalities meet and mingle together as if they were all from the same family.

Ann, Deno and wife, Christa have a Greek heritage, one uncle was born in India, one bi-racial, Mos, the best man, Jewish and one grew up in Saudi Arabia. One guest was from Honolulu, one from the Netherlands and one from Holland. Six of Deno's attendants were from the same neighborhood in Flint, Michigan.

The other night after Mos revealed the escapades of a bunch of high



Points East

By: Ike Adams

Early this morning, right at the crack of daylight, the phone rang.

I have one of those cordless phones with a little Caller ID window on the back of it that is probably useful to young people, but my eyes are too blurry at 5:45 a.m. to see anything other than a little black square and I can't even tell if there is a name and number in it at that hour, much less read about who it is that's calling me.

I answered the phone anyway, figuring that someone was sick or maybe even dead because the older you get the more calls of that nature you get in the wee hours.

"Is this Ike Adams," a cheerful, feminine voice on the other end wanted to know? It was the voice of someone who sounded like they had already had coffee and probably a couple of eggs, but it was not the sort of voice that got used to bad news. Nor was it the sort of voice that chews you out because you insulted a member of the state legislature in your newspaper column that the owner of the voice is kin to.

"Are you still there," the voice wanted to know because I was giving some serious deliberation as to whether or not I really wanted to admit that I was me. My personal disposition is rarely pleasant before 6 o'clock in the morning and the owner of the voice had not even asked if they had gotten me out of bed.

In fact, the owner of the voice sounded like it was a normal hour to be calling folks up to have a pow-wow. But I figured what the heck, and agreed that I was me.

"You're the one that writes all the gardening stuff in the newspaper," it was more a statement of fact than a question. "Where do you work?"

By now I'm figuring that I must not have filled out my census form the way they wanted me to because I couldn't think of any other reason a stranger would be calling me so early. Telemarketers only call when I sit down to eat dinner.

So I told her that I worked at the Federation of Appalachian Housing Enterprises figuring that the next question would want to know a bit more precisely what it is I did there or that maybe she was wanting to buy a house.

Instead she said, "Never heard of it. What town is it in?"

I told we were in Berea and started to explain how to get to the office and she cut me off again.

"Good, she said. I need you to stop by my house on your way to work because I have a problem with my peanuts and I want you to look at them. Do you have a pen and paper handy so I can give you directions?"

I stumbled through the house shaking my head and probably muttering but I found the writing pad and parked myself at the kitchen table dressed only in my skivvies and wondering what the lady on the other end of the phone would think if she knew she was talking to a man who was half awake and darn near naked.

I told her I had the pen and paper and she rattled off an address that I

school boys in their prime of life and had us all in stitches over what they had done behind the backs of their parents, with Deno as his scapegoat and denying everything he said and the hearty laughter of the others confirming it. I realized what real friendship is about and stood up to tell them about my discovery of what real friendship is about.

Here stood a group of men who had grown up together, learned about life and love together, cheated or helped one and remained close friends through it all. Race, color, riches, poverty or background never hindered their relationship. They had kept their sense of humor and loyalty to each other through thick and thin and this was now the results of that closeness. That proves to me we can all live in harmony. This great country we live in was founded on diversity and thanks to boys like you it still thrives on it.

had never heard of. When I told her I didn't know where it was she laughed and told me that's why she thought it was a good idea for me to get something to take notes with.

She commenced giving directions from Berea to her place. Suffice it to say that these involved going under a railroad and several miles out into the country and that her place was actually farther from Berea than my house and in the opposite direction. But I wrote it all down.

"Do you think you'll be here before 7:30," she wanted to know. "I usually leave the office around 5:30," I replied. There was a pause and then she said, "Oh no, I meant couldn't you stop by this morning?"

I told her that the dew would still be on the peanuts and I didn't want to get my good shoes wet, but that I'd be glad to come out around six this evening.

For the first time since our conversation had begun 10 minutes earlier she sounded a little disappointed but she said she'd be looking for me.

I hung up the phone and it occurred to me that I had never gotten her name or phone number. I finally found my reading glasses and held the phone out about 18 inches from my face and turned it a little sideways so that I could read the info in the Caller ID window. I had never heard of the woman.

As I was going to mention her name because she asked me not to this afternoon and followed the request up with sheer bribery consisting of a huge piece of apple pie, a big cup of coffee and a standing invitation to come back for more anytime.

Turns out she and her late husband are retired school teachers from Louisville and she has a daughter teaching in Madison County. She'd bought a nice little brick house and an acre out in the country and this was her first year gardening. And what a garden it is. Bigger than my own it does not contain a single plant that is not there on purpose. Among the hundred or more varieties of flowers and vegetables still producing are three rows of peanuts with vines that are beginning to die back.

"They've bloomed and been healthy as a horse all summer, she said, but there's not a peanut on them. I thought she was going to faint when I bent over, grabbed a big vine right at the ground and yanked it out of the rich black soil. At least two dozen big peanut shells dangled from the roots and perhaps as many more snapped off in ground. "Please tell me that you will not put this in the paper," she implored.

We finally agreed that hardly anybody knows her anyway and as long as I didn't mention her name it would be okay because she doesn't want her daughter and grandchildren to be embarrassed.

In the meantime, if the phone rings at 5:45 again tomorrow morning, I'm just going to get dressed and go garden with my new friend. There's half of a big apple pie that I would hate to let spoil and I'd bet anything that coffee tastes better in the morning.

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