

# SOUTH AMERICA SURPRISE

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› JUNE 15, 2013

# AMERICAN WAY

AMERICAN AIRLINES + AMERICAN EAGLE

\*ORD\*

# Opa!

Our intrepid reporter goes on a mission to sample saganaki at every restaurant in **CHICAGO'S GREEKTOWN**



**ALSO:** Diagnosis and Treatment of  
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TWICE MONTHLY

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100,000 AAdvantage miles  
(pg. 12)



**A UNIQUE EMAIL** came in the other day. It was unique to me, anyway. I suppose that if you've been in this business long enough, you begin to operate under the assumption that no news is good news. That's not to say we don't love letters here at *American Way*. We do, so much so that every issue of *AW* contains our "Air Mail" section (turn to page 12), in which we answer and publish a selection of the hundreds of letters we receive each month. Of course, by having your letter published, you're automatically entered into our annual drawing for 100,000 AAdvantage miles. That's a pretty good incentive for simply telling us what you think while reading our semi-monthly magazine — the only one in the airline industry that is twice a month, mind you.

But this letter the other day was unique. Perhaps it's because there was no mention of our 100,000-AAdvantage-miles contest. Or maybe it was because it was a letter about *AW* that a reader sent to my personal email account, available after only a few clicks on the Web. But still, those few clicks take some research and time.

It was from Michelle Nacheman in Chicago. Her subject line was: "Collection of Articles," and her email, I assumed, was a request for some back issues of *American Way*, something that we're more than happy to provide when we have extras, whether you email us at headquarters or whether you track down our editorial staff with a few clicks to our personal accounts. This staff is dedicated — the most dedicated I've ever seen.

Michelle's letter did inquire about past issues. Sort of. The more I read her email, the more I smiled. Michelle was writing on behalf of her husband, Scott. Scott is a frequent American Airlines

# Chicago's Bravest

flier — a real road warrior, as it were. What's more, Scott is a fan of this column. Michelle was putting together a surprise for her husband's 40th birthday, and she wanted to know if there is a place she could purchase a collection of my columns and have them autographed for her husband.

Now folks: After being the editor of this magazine for going on five years, I can say — emphatically — that I don't exactly have a fan club. My mother likes my stories, and so do some of her friends. That's not to say we don't receive fan mail to the magazine as a whole. We do, and that's exactly how we want it. No one person is more important than any other here at American Airlines Publishing. Still, I really wanted to enjoy this celebrity moment, but I didn't want to make it look like this was an anomaly. So I wrote Michelle back, playing it super cool, as if hers was just one of many fan letters I received that day.

"Wow! I'm honored!!!" my letter began. Yeah, so much for playing hard to get. After some back and forth, I learned that Scott is a former firefighter, is currently a forensic-engineering consultant and also serves as a building-collapse specialist for the Department of Homeland Security/FEMA urban-search-and-rescue program. Michelle is a paramedic officer for the Chicago Fire Department. Scott travels all over the world for his job. Michelle works mostly on Chicago's West Side. It's an area I know all too well. Several years ago, I wrote a book about a boxer named Gabriel Sandoval from the West Side of Chicago. He was there illegally, brought by his parents from Mexico at the age of 7. While researching the book on the man the world would come to know as Jesus "El Matador" Chavez, the former lightweight boxing champion of the world, I spent a lot of time on Chicago's West Side. I spoke to firefighters there, and I learned that sometimes, when they responded to a call, they were vulnerable marks for gang activity. In Michelle's case, as a paramedic, she is a first responder to the carnage. Michelle, her husband and the rest of the CFD are real-life heroes. They put their lives on the line daily to save ours.

And they are *my* fans? That's backward: That's like saying Paul McCartney was in a little band called The Beatles before he was in Wings. The Nachemans are people who wake up every morning and know that their day is going to be tough. They know, undeniably, that when the bell rings in the station house, someone's life has forever changed — and for the worse. Yet they have the

mettle to wake up every morning, embrace their jobs, mentally take their work home with them every night, and then wake up and do it again. They are role models, even though they're not trying to be. People like them are out there, plying their trades and honing their skills. Just look at the fantastic feature story on page 52 about paraplegic bodybuilders. These men and women illustrate human resolve in extremis. They're role models also. And so is Brandon Stanton on page 28. And so are the health care professionals on page 40. And so are all the other hard-working people in the city of Chicago, one of the finest cities in the world (page 44).

I sent Scott an autographed copy of *Standing Eight*, the book I wrote about Jesus Chavez. It arrived on his birthday. I asked Michelle and Scott for their autographs. They're the real celebrities of this story. And like true role models, they responded. Look closely at the picture to the left and see what they sent me.

Folks, the next time you're in Chicago — and when you see their firefighters or paramedics — introduce yourself, shake their hands and thank them. Get their autographs if you can. They're the best and the bravest. And if you're not planning a trip to Chicago anytime soon, I really think you should: You don't know what you're missing.



ADAM PITLUK  
Editor

@ Want to talk to Adam? Reach him at [editor@americanwaymag.com](mailto:editor@americanwaymag.com)

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