

AMERICAN WAY

May 2015



OUR CAPTAIN

The First Avenger himself, **Chris Evans**, is one of the most genetically engineered nice guys you'll ever meet

L.A. YOGI

Nowhere are yoga studios popping up faster than in SoCal

ROOT FOR THE CUBBIES

Could Chicago's most storied sports franchise finally go all the way?

EDITOR'S NOTE

By Adam Pittluk



BUENOS AMIGOS

HALFWAY THROUGH READING the page proofs for this issue, I was overwhelmed with nostalgia for times gone by. It was one of those longing feelings that made me close up the laptop, and then close my eyes and reminisce. There were three stories that transported me back to a particular time and place faster and with more clarity than any Flux Capacitor ever could.

We try to strike a perfect content balance in the pages of *American Way* so that our general-interest read can quite literally be something for everybody. It's an artistic undertaking to be sure, involving a witches' brew of ingredients. Indeed, this issue has a diverse array of stories, but three of them in particular made me long for yesterday. "Get on Your High Horse" (page 78) turned the clock back to 1995, when my parents dropped me off at college in Missouri as they moved from Ohio to Arizona. I wasn't an overly well-traveled 18-year-old at the time, and I knew absolutely nothing about the Grand Canyon State. Nothing could have prepared me for the rugged majesty of the Sonoran Desert, which I witnessed for the first time when I visited my new home for Christmas vacation.

I never gave up my allegiance to my hometown of Cleveland, not during

college in the middle of America, not when I started returning "home" to Arizona for an indefinite number of holidays, and not now. I'm a die-hard Cleveland Indians baseball fan, but my National League allegiance has always been to the Chicago Cubs because of one summer I spent at Northwestern University's National High School Institute journalism program in 1993.

The summer I spent along the shores of Lake Michigan as a Cherub, as we were affectionately known, was one of the best of my life. It's the reason I chose journalism as a profession (even though Northwestern University ultimately rejected me when I applied there for college, to which I say, "Bully for Ol' Mizzou!"). The story about the bedeviled Chicago Cubs ("Chicago's Hope" on page 46) took me back to 1993 and put me back in the bleachers at Wrigley Field. (The story also makes my earlier Flux Capacitor reference less obscure.)

Then there's "Opening Up the Classroom" on page 54, about the fine work happening at the University of Texas at Arlington with their Asian Executive MBA program. That story reminds me of my first teaching job. I began as the

faculty magazine advisor at UTA and later became an adjunct professor in the department of communications. I still keep in touch with some of the faculty and staff. I also went on to hire some of my former students in later years.

Yes, reading those digital page proofs compelled me, with closed eyes, to revisit some of the finer moments of this job; and then I opened my eyes, closed those digital files and revisited the hard copies of the magazine.

ON A CHILLY DAY IN DECEMBER 2008, A FREQUENT FLYER NAMED SERGIO WALKED INTO THE AMERICAN AIRLINES HEADQUARTERS AND REQUESTED A MEETING.

Sometimes, the medium of the media is an integral tool to elicit the correct emotional return. So I went to the bookshelf, pulled out the June 15, 2009, and the Oct. 1, 2012, issues, physically brushed the dust off the copies and began to read one story from each issue.

The cover story from that June 2009 issue was titled "By Land and Sea," and it featured Belize first lady Kim Simplis Barrow on the cover. She anchored the issue with her beautiful photograph on a sun-splashed beach, lazing under a palm tree. I wrote that article shortly

after visiting the country for the first time, and similarly, shortly after meeting the first lady.

The second story I read was written by the first lady herself. Three years after our meeting, Kim Simplis Barrow was diagnosed with stage-three breast cancer. I'd asked her to be the guest editor of the Oct. 1, 2012, issue (which was dedicated to breast-cancer-awareness month) because of her courageous story: She endured six sessions of chemotherapy, mastectomy and lymphadenectomy surgery, and 30 sessions of radiation. After the 15th session, she suffered heart failure, so they had to stop the treatment. The first lady went from being a cancer patient to being a cancer patient *and* a heart patient.

Reading those two stories in ink-and-paper format immediately brought me back to beautiful Belize, even though I hadn't been there in more than five years. That's when I remembered how Belize got on my radar in the first place: On a chilly day in December 2008, a frequent flyer named Sergio walked into the American Airlines headquarters and requested a meeting.

Sergio Torres was working with the Belize Tourism Board at the time. We met in my office. As an AAdvantage Executive Platinum flyer and frequent reader of *American Way*, he wanted to know why he hadn't read any Belize stories in *AW*. It was a good question. "I don't know," was my reply. "I started two months ago."

"Hermano, you need to change that."

He was right. And I did. That's still one of my favorite stories — and destinations.

The nostalgia of reading the two Belize stories and then recalling the time Sergio paid me a visit compelled me to track down ol' Sergio. I saw on Facebook that he is now the CEO of Club Quinta, a vacation-ownership company in Playa del Carmen, Mexico. I sent him a message on Facebook and asked how everything was going. He told me about how beautiful Playa is, about the relaxed environment, the fabulous cuisine

and the bustling nightlife. It sounded like spring break for big kids — big kids like me. That's when I called him up.

"Hermano," I began when he answered. "I'm coming down there."

It was a last-minute, whirlwind trip. My favorite kind of trip, truth be told. Sergio and his friend, Joaquin Martinez from Paradise Transfers and Tours, showed me the ropes. We spent a great deal of time on Quinta Avenida (Fifth Avenue), the main drag, where we stuffed our faces, spoke with locals, and where I bought knickknacks for my kids. The capstone of the trip was dinner at Almirante Pech, the most trendy restaurant and bar in Playa. We spent hours on their patio eating delicious seafood caught earlier that day, sampling vast selections of tequilas and mezcals, and shooting the breeze about all sorts of topics. Joaquin and I became fast friends. Sergio and I picked up right where we left off, only this time we swore not to lose touch.

It is our sincere hope that this issue of *American Way* stimulates some long-ago memories. Take the time, won't you, to sit back and let this witches' brew of content work its magic on you, hopefully to the same successful conclusion that it did me.

Reconnecting with Sergio made me genuinely happy, as did making friends with Joaquin. And so did reflecting on all those old memories. The only thing missing from my trip down memory lane is a future trip to Belize to reconnect with that country, and to visit my friend Kim Simplis Barrow. Thankfully (and blessedly), she is feeling good and doing well. And I know she'll be happy to receive me and my family.

That's the thing about good friends.



Adam Pitluk
Editor



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