

Follow the pro's advice when traveling

The scene is an airline terminal. Two of my friends meet accidentally near the check-in counter. Janet is on the way home from her first business connection. She has just tipped the porter, dragged her two suitcases onto the scale and picked up her hand luggage. She looks whacked out.

Harold comes in from the taxi ramp carrying an in-flight bag. He looks fresh and ready to go to work.

"Hey, Janet. Did you have a good trip?"

He shouldn't have asked. Her plane was delayed, there was a missed connection, the hotel lost her reservation and she was exhausted from dragging suitcases on and off conveyor belts.

"It reminds me of my first business trip 22 years ago," Harold said cheerfully.

"I couldn't get on the breakfast flight so they put me on a later one. I missed my connection. I spent so long getting luggage on and off that I missed half my appointments. Then I spent an hour finding a room because the hotel didn't have my reservation."

By the time Janet had picked her brain, she had a new viewpoint on business trips. Smart people learn from the professionals. Harold is a pro.

He never lets anybody else make his plane reservations. If the airline can't get him on a 7 a.m. flight, they try to put him on a 10 a.m. flight but he balks.

TRAVEL LOG of Iris Jones



"They naturally want you to fly on their airline," he says. "I'm surprised how many people accept that 10 a.m. flight without squawking. I ask them to tell me what other airlines have flights out before 10 a.m. All they need to do is check the Airlines Official Guide (AOG) on the counter in front of them, and they'll do it cheerfully if you ask."

If Harold misses a connection, he starts making corrections while still aboard the first leg of his journey. Every plane carries an AOG. The stewardess tells him when the next available flight goes to his destination. He is at the airline counter minutes after landing.

What about picking up his luggage? He doesn't do that anymore, not on brief business trips. He carries an in-flight bag that holds one suit and a few necessities. He stores it under his plane seat. When the plane lands he has luggage in hand, ready to go.

If a hotel loses his reservation he no longer picks up his bag and goes elsewhere.

"First of all, I make the reservation through American Express or some other national telex service. If I make it far enough in advance I get written confirmation.

"And, if I still have a problem, I stand my ground and become insistent. It is a matter of how you handle yourself personally there at the hotel desk."

"Traveling is a learned skill."

The scruffy little town that produced a president

By IRIS SANDERSON JONES

PLAINS, Ga.—It is the kind of house your grandmother had in the country, with an atmosphere of blue-jeaned informality and relaxation.

But this wasn't just anybody's grandmother or anybody's house. It was Miss Lillian's, the home of the mother of the President of the United States.

Miss Lillian is just part of the experience of visiting the tiny community of Plains, Ga., on your way down Interstate 75 to Florida.

Meeting famous towns is like meeting famous people, and you are likely to do both if you visit Plains, where Main Street is a movie set and people play their part to the hilt.

Plains is a scruffy-looking little town, but tourists inspect every inch of it eagerly. This is the setting that produced a president.

Railway tracks curve under the water tower at one end of the main street and run two blocks to the depot which was Jimmy's campaign headquarters at the other end.

On one side of the tracks is a block of 10 stores that was half empty until it filled with tourists shops after Carter's election. Across the tracks is the Plains Men's Club — that's what the local people call Billy Carter's service center.

Billy's gas station is everything it's said to be, a run-down little gas station with a clutter of trucks and cars and coke bottles between the ticket booth that sells tour tickets at the front of the station and the sign that advertises Billy's Beer at the back.

Miss Lillian attended the launching of Billy's Beer because, "I attended the inauguration of one son, so why not another."

There are four tour companies in town, because this village of 700 people had 2,000-3,000 tourists a day, but the rush has slowed, to the delight of some, to the dismay of others.

It's worth taking the tour, because it gives you the story of an American family in the few square blocks of the town.

Our tour leader was Maxine: "I was Jimmy's campaign manager when people were asking, 'Jimmy who?'"

IN A FEW short miles of Plains, you have the same experience you would have touring a historic village, only here the buildings and the streets are still alive.

This is the house where Miss Lillian lived, and then moved from because the tourists mobbed her. Here is the house where Billy and Sybil lived, but they, too, moved because their children couldn't play in the front yard.

Jimmy and Roslyn once lived in this house, the oldest house in the county. There is the farm where the boys grew up, the school they attended, the church where they were married.

Here is the new school-house Amy attended and

the field where Jimmy played baseball with reporters during his campaign. Here, behind a security gate, is where Jimmy Carter lives now, when he's home.

The tour bus takes you down a red clay road and points out the small temporary house in the pine trees where Miss Lillian lived, but it doesn't usually stop.

Our group had been invited to drive through the gate to the door; Miss Lillian would come and say hello, but we were told to stay in the little tour van.

Soon Miss Lillian came out with Sybil Carter, and the youngest Billy baby. Miss Lillian approached the van door looking exactly like a television replica of herself and said cheerfully: "How 'y'all."

We were tongue-tied for only a moment while Miss Lillian looked at us through those homely eyes, under her cap of white hair. Silence. "How

are your chickens, Miss Lillian?" I asked lamely. "The rooster's out in the woods crowing and the hens followed him," she said. "They like the wild food better than what I feed them."

Our cameras were clicking when she unexpectedly said, "Would you all like to come in and see my house?" The tour operators gaped. Miss Lillian's house was a

lakeside property. Nobody gets asked into her house. We looked out and followed her eagerly inside. The television was on in the corner. A clutter of comfortable furniture looked through the plate glass window to the pond. To one side was a tiny kitchen and a small dining el with a formica table.

Above was a loft where five guests could sleep. Miss Lillian lives here alone with only a man who comes in during the day to help her. She is 80.

On a shelf was a

memento from Miss Lillian's time in the Peace Corps in India, and in the corner a thriving six-foot-tall plant.

"Did 'y'all ever have anybody give you something at the airport that was too big to carry aboard?" she asked. "The wife of the President of the Philippines gave me this tree, and I couldn't give it away because she watched me until we got on the plane. I can't imagine how that airplane got it home to Georgia."

"I go fishing sometimes on the lake out there. Somebody sent me a box of worms which I put in the refrigerator. I didn't catch any fish with them, but the next day they were all over the refrigerator and all over the kitchen!"

"You'll probably think I'm terrible when I tell you this, but I have one little drink of bourbon every day."

"What do you do when you go the White House, now that Jimmy doesn't serve liquor there?" somebody asked.

"I always manage," she said, smiling sweetly. "Maybe it's because I bring it with me."

SUDDENLY Miss Lillian turned to me and said, "Did you hear about the day that I made an ass of myself on television?" I shook my head no. In all my fantasies I talk glibly to famous people, but I wasn't doing too well that day.

"Well now, I was on a talk show," she said, "and I was wearing a skirt and my slip showed. You know I never wear skirts any more! Do you?"

"I sat down like this, and it showed even more. So there I was, surrounded by men, trying to tuck my slip up so I wouldn't shame the family, but we couldn't get rid of that slip."

"So I said 'bring me a

butcher knife,' and I cut the straps off and just pulled it off over my feet. You should have seen their faces! There were two college students standing there saying 'Miss Lillian, would you give me something to suction at college?' so I signed that darn slip and handed it to them."

We were mesmerized. We left the house to wander the yard, past the two-story chicken house, the clothes line pinned with clothes, and the lake store where Jimmy held his famous fish fries.

As we climbed back into the bus, Maxine came out of the house laughing and Miss Lillian's voice followed her, saying, "Don't you leave any of them behind now."

If you visit Plains, you



Downtown Plains, Ga., was half empty until it filled with tourist shops after Carter's election. (Photo by Iris Sanderson Jones)

probably won't be invited into Miss Lillian's house, but you might very well see her in a rocking chair on the platform of the depot, or visiting Billy at his gas station.

You might see Roslyn's mother, Miss Allen, as we did. Even if you only see the town, you will still come away with the feeling of having met somebody famous.



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