

Jim's Perspective...

A Family Trip To Chicago

I've watched some of the Democratic National Convention being held in Chicago at the United Center. I am amazed at the gigantic size of this indoor arena. Seeing the arena brought back fond memories of a family trip we took to Chicago in the spring, back in the early 1990's. The highlight of this trip was going to the old Chicago Stadium to see Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls play an NBA game. I forget who was the opponent. I remember entering this arena and was surprised at how much it reminded me of the old Nebraska Coliseum. Chicago Stadium was a traditional, classical, architectural building. A bit of a relic in the arena world, but when it was built in 1929, it was the largest indoor sports arena in the world. So it was neat to see, but I expected something more modern and much larger than the Nebraska Coliseum. My primary large indoor basketball arena experience when I was a boy, was the old Nebraska Coliseum located on the University of Nebraska downtown Lincoln campus. From the mid-1970's until 2013, I attended various Husker basketball games at the Devaney Sports Center (which replaced the Coliseum), also located near the downtown university campus.

We often traveled to Chicago with the kids to see Janie's older sister, Kathleen, and her husband, Bill and their two children, all of whom lived in a suburban village west of downtown Chicago. Because of our travels to Chicago, we were big fans of the Chicago Bulls, and loved to watch Michael Jordan play basketball. Besides visiting Kathleen and Bill and their children at their home, we usually also spent a few days in downtown Chicago because Kathleen and Bill also had a condominium in the John Hancock Building located at 875 North Michigan Avenue. We usually stayed at the Embassy Suites Hotel in the Downtown River North area of Chicago which was not far from the John Hancock Building.

It was not easy to obtain quality seats (or any seats at all) to see Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls play a home game at the Chicago Stadium. However, we had an inside connection to Chicago Bulls tickets that placed us in a prime location to watch the Bulls play. In a way, our opportunity for prime seating at the Bulls game can be traced back to when Janie and I were very young and going to grade school, junior high school, and high school. Janie's family and my family were members of Catholic parishes located in the Lincoln Catholic Diocese. Living in Chicago, Kathleen and Bill got to know a priest who was in a Catholic Diocese in the Chicago area. The priest somehow was able to obtain tickets to the Bulls game through someone in the Diocese who worked in an upper-level executive position within the Bulls organization. These tickets provided us with excellent seats for the bulls game we attended. Back in high school, I would have never thought that I would be sitting in excellent seating at a Chicago Bulls basketball game thanks to a priest from Chicago!

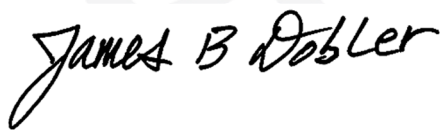
My two boys and I, Bill and his son, and the priest, attended the game. All of us loved it! The boys wore various Michael Jordan items of clothing. As they watched the game, they were amazed to see Jordan maneuver in many magnificent ways to help the Bulls win the game. We, of course, bought some Bulls memorabilia on our way out of Chicago Stadium.

Our trips to Chicago over the years, involved many other fun activities. When staying downtown, we often visited Navy Pier where there were many carnival rides, and fire works at night. We sometimes went to the Chicago Art Museum. We also purchased tickets for a boat ride down the Chicago River that was called The Chicago River Architecture Tour. Of course, we always went to Chicago Cubs baseball games. At the top of the John Hancock Building, there was a very nice bar and restaurant (The Signature Room/now closed) where we occasionally had dinner while downtown. Everyone loved the spectacular view of downtown Chicago. I still remember sitting at the bar of the Signature Room with my Beefeater, London Dry Gin martini, ordered up (no ice), very dry (no vermouth) with an olive. Just a very fun place to sit, visit and enjoy the view with a cocktail!

When staying at Kathleen and Bill's home, we usually took the kids to the amusement park, Great America. The vacation at their home also always involved going out to dinner on at least one night while there, at the Village Tavern, near where they lived. Kathleen and Bill's home was next to a small lake. This lake provided a fun experience of floating on an inner tube on the lake, or running down the sandy beach and into the water just to swim. One time all of us were floating on inner tubs in the evening, and just laughing about various things. I suddenly came up with the idea that we were "The Floating Laughers".

My description of this trip to Chicago also kind of illustrates one of the unique aspects of life; and that is the beauty of remembrance. It is always there. It never goes away. A family vacation is especially memorable. Family is a fundamental bedrock of life. I often think about the many fun times our family had with Kathleen and Bill's family. How unique, always fun, and how often I just sit back, and remember!

And so, I humbly suggest to you, with summer almost over and kids back in school, to take a moment, sit back, relax, and recall a family vacation. The fun things scheduled for the children; seeing parts of America you have never seen before; enjoying the trip with other family relatives; and perhaps indulging in a martini!



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