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ITINERARIES

FREQUENT FLIER

Juggler's Knives Inspire a Command Performance

I USED to juggle for a living. When I performed, I always had a bag full of props with me: five juggling balls, four tennis rackets, a few torches and three large rusty meat knives.

I was traveling from New York to Memphis to juggle at the Cotton Carnival, now called Carnival Memphis. It's similar to Mardi Gras, and there are people there who belong to a secret society in which they dress up like giant boll weevils.

It seemed like my kind of party and a good place for a juggler to make a buck.

So there I was at La Guardia with my props. I didn't want to check them because I was afraid they would be lost and I would be left without an act.

The security people X-rayed my bag and immediately pulled me out of the line.

I was a little nervous when they asked my why I was attempting to travel to Memphis

By Josh Selig, as told to Joan Raymond. E-mail: joan.raymond@nytimes.com.

Q. How often do you fly?

A. At a minimum, about once a month. But in the last six months, I've been to Qatar, Ireland, Canada, Australia and England, and I had to fly twice to California.

Q. What's your least favorite airport?

A. Cancún. It's the real Montezuma's revenge, since the last time I was there only one guy was checking passports. It took two hours to get through customs.

Q. Of all the places you've been, what's the best?

A. The Galápagos. There's something really wonderful about the animals having no fear of humans. And the baby sea lions looked really happy to see me.

Q. What's your secret airport vice?

A. Shopping for gifts at Heathrow. British money doesn't seem real to me, so I wind up spending way more than I should.

with three rusty meat knives. I told them I was going to the Cotton Carnival, and went into a rather long-winded explanation of the people who dress up as boll weevils. I then told them the meat knives were part of my act.

The security people left me alone for a few minutes and whispered among themselves, each one carefully holding and examining a different knife. Finally, they broke their huddle and ap-

proached me with grim looks on their faces. One of the guards, who I assume was their leader, extended the three knives toward me and said that they wanted to see me juggle.

I was actually pretty good. I taught myself by watching Alan Alda juggle vegetables on "M*A*S*H." So, in front of the security detail at La Guardia as well as a dozen other passengers, some of who I imagine were also

heading off to the Cotton Carnival, I juggled my three rusty meat knives.

I even did an under-the-leg toss for good measure. The crowd applauded, the guards smiled, and I was sent on my merry way with all my juggling props.

That was all pre-9/11. I can only imagine how differently that story would have played out in today's airports.

Once I realized that juggling wasn't a sustainable way to make a living, I went to work in children's television. Which seemed like a perfect segue to me.

Nothing stimulates the creative centers of my brain better than a window seat in business class and one strong Bloody Mary. I rarely have five hours to be alone, and I look at this time as a luxury.

I do a lot of writing while I'm in flight and draw cavemanlike doodles of new characters, show ideas and even new businesses.

On a recent flight to Doha, Qatar, I began ruminating on how things might move across a TV screen. I remembered seeing the dancer Savion Glover emoté with



Airport officials required Josh Selig to prove he could juggle the knives in his carry-on bag before they would let him board.

his feet during a performance at the Public Theater so I started to imagine dancing feet.

The celery in my drink triggered the image of a bunny rabbit, and suddenly I was seeing two tap-dancing bunny slippers. They had cute faces and they were singing a strange melodic duet. Soon other shoes joined them, including a cowboy boot, a soccer cleat and a headed moccas-

sin named Little Sole.

By the time we landed in Doha, I had an outline for a Busby Berkeley-style feature film that we are now writing.

For some people, flying is a dull routine of bad food, sleep deprivation and reruns of "Friends." I prefer to think of flying as quality time. But, on occasion, I do miss flying with those juggling props.