

HOW I MET TRUMAN JONES

I go out of the Air Force on July 15, 1964. I got a job right away at a shoe factory but it was tedious and minimum wage. An airline job had been in my mind for several years and I was hoping my military air freight experience would transfer to a commercial airline position. Saturday, August 1, 1964, I drove out to the Hot Springs, Arkansas airport to find another job. I found out that there were four airlines flying into Hot Springs - Delta, Braniff, Trans Texas and Central. I went to the Delta ticket counter and asked the agent about a job. He said, "Atlanta does our hiring," and was not helpful. The next counter was Braniff and the agent told me that Dallas did their hiring. So I continue to the next counter, getting discouraged all the while, and damned if the agent didn't say almost the same thing, "Houston does all our hiring."

At the very end, behind a pillar and almost out of sight, was Central Airlines and my last hope. I went up to the fellow at the counter with sinking heart. I asking him about a job and he said, "Fort Worth does all our hiring," and I was filled with dismay. Then he said, "But if you want to fill out an application I will send it in for you." His name tag said Jeff Gilbert and I almost jumped across that counter and hugged him. I will be forever indebted to Jeff for his assistance. I filled out the application and he said he would send it down to Fort Worth that night.

Next week, I'm back at the shoe factory trying to master the sidelasting machine and it's not going well. On Wednesday afternoon, the 5th, I am paged that I have a phone call at the office. That's ominous because I was told NO PHONE CALLS at work. I am worried that something has happened to my mother. I get to the office and they are fluttering around like it's a big deal and my heart sinks.

"Hello," I said and this voice says, "Hi, I'm Truman Jones with Central Airlines. I just got your application and we would like for you to come down to Fort Worth for an interview." I eagerly agreed and he said a pass would be sent to the Hot Springs office and for me to catch the first flight next morning to Fort Worth and plan to return that afternoon. My supervisor had followed me to the office and I turned to him and said, "I need to take tomorrow off to interview for a job in Texas." He spit and sputtered as we headed back to my sidelasting machine and finally said okay. I had already decided I was going one way or another.

After work I called Central Airlines and got the time for the morning flight, about 7:30 am. He told me to be there no later than 7 am and tell the counter agent I was on a pass which should be awaiting pick up. Next morning, there's Jeff Gilbert at the counter and when he sees me he waves the passes, tells me space should be good all the way and wishes me luck as he clears me onboard the DC-3. The aircraft looked just like the one on my first airplane ride three years before when I joined the Air Force and flew from Little Rock to Dallas.

The flight went from Hot Springs to Fort Smith to Paris, TX to Dallas to Fort Worth where I arrived about 1 pm. I was the only passenger on the flight into Fort Worth's Greater Southwest Airport from Dallas' Love Field. GSW, the airline code for the airport, was a ghost of a facility and hugely under-used. I was the only person walking through the terminal which was enormous and wonderfully decorated. I did not know what to make of it. I walked over to the Central Airlines headquarters which were not that far from the terminal and found Truman Jones fairly easy.

Truman reviewed my application and asked about my Air Force experience in air freight. He said that was a great piece of training and would fit in very well with being a passenger service agent with Central. They wanted to expand their air freight at every opportunity. The only thing I was concerned about was my typing. The application said 35 words per minute minimum were required. I had always been a "hunt and peck" typist and didn't have access to a typewriter to time myself before flying down for the interview. Truman asked me if I could type 35 words per minute and I said I could and that was that. Later, I found that if my interviewer had been Jim Shores, I would have had a timed test. Luckily, I got Truman because Shores was out of the office.

Truman had me move five full duffle bags from one pile to another to see what kind of physical shape I was in. I still had muscles from three years hard labor in the Air Force loading and unloading cargo planes. I one-handed the duffles quickly and grinned at him. He grinned back. Guess he had to do it no matter. Then he said, "I think you will do great as an agent with us. We have four vacancies and you can have your pick. They are Kansas City, Missouri, Harrison, Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas and Paris, Texas." Shoot, that was an easy choice because I wanted to go to the University of Arkansas. "I'll take Fayetteville," I said and told him I wanted to give the shoe factory two weeks notice and he agreed that was proper. Truman replied, "You got it. Report for work to Don Enos on Wednesday, August 26, at 2 p.m." My days off would be Monday and Tuesday - welcome to airline shift work.

I got the last flight out of Fort Worth to Dallas and made connections back to Hot Springs later that evening. I was walking on cloud nine! I had a job with the airlines which paid \$1.89 per hour (\$335 per month) with a full benefit package! Not to mention the travel benefits. The shoe factory was paying \$1.25 per hour and few benefits

I had a future and those walls that had been closing in on me just fell away. It was one of the most exhilarating moments of my life. I'll always be thankful to Jeff and Truman for giving me a chance.

-Excerpt from SINGLEHANDER, a memoir by Jake Lamkins