

The Keynote Chronicle



Humor News from Jan McInnis

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Tour Guide Adventures: Lost Kids and Kickbacks

The Washington Monument is 555 feet, 5 1/8 inches tall. At his namesake memorial, Abraham Lincoln's statue's thumb is the length of three NFL footballs. And there are many traffic circles in D.C. because the designer, Pierre L'Enfant thought it would confuse the enemy if the city were ever attacked.

I didn't Google this stuff! I learned it when I was a tour guide in Washington, D.C. During summers between college and right after graduation I worked on the Tourmobile, a bus that took tourists around the city for day trips. I also worked for a private tour company guiding multi-day tours with out-of-town groups in which I stayed with the group for their whole 3 or 4 day trip.

One memorable time private company trip, my fellow tour guide Patty and I were booked to guide a group of about 60 school kids from Nebraska (ages 10-13) around D.C. for three days. The kids were great, but the trip was challenging for a number of reasons.

Challenge one came the morning after touring Arlington National Cemetery (ANC). As we loaded up the kids, we noticed one of them was missing. Now ANC is HUGE and without cell phones or Apple AirTags, it was pretty hard to go out and find this kid. Plus, we had a schedule to keep! We had drilled into the kids that if they got lost, they should go to the subway, called Metro, and find their way to the Cleveland Park stop on the red line. We made the kids repeat this several times, so we decided to rely on this training and move on. (I know, I can't believe we left the kid either, but as a 22-year-old, my critical thinking skills weren't very well developed and even the teacher chaperone didn't insist we should stay.)

Challenge two came later that afternoon. This teacher had chaperoned a lot of DC trips, and she insisted that we make a stop at the forbidden Souvenir City. The tour company had forbidden us guides from bringing groups there because the souvenirs were cheaply made, not to mention that the guides and bus drivers were given incentive money (also known as kickbacks) for bringing in groups. If the tour guide agency caught you at Souvenir City with your group, you were fired on the spot!

But this teacher absolutely insisted we go. She said her kids were on very tight budgets, and they just couldn't afford expensive gifts – a dollar went a *long* way at Souvenir City. She even offered to take the blame if we got caught! So, we went. Shockingly, no one from the tour agency saw our huge green **DOUBLE-DECKER** tour bus parked there. I was sweating the whole time, but when I got my share of the bribe (\$100, which was about what I made in a day), I decided Souvenir City wasn't so bad.



The Bed

Spotlight

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We continued touring around the city and going to the museums, until we went back to the hotel around 5 pm for dinner and to get ready for the monument night tour. As the kids got off the bus, one of them came up to us and asked, "Where's my brother? I haven't seen him since this morning at the cemetery." Patty and I took a beat, and just as we were about to say "We're not exactly sure, but he's somewhere in DC. . ." the kid's brother strolled up! Turns out he actually listened to our metro instructions, and he had had a really great day! The cemetery backs up to Ft. Myers army base, and he had wandered off to watch a military funeral, and then somehow ended up at Army Base. After strolling around for a bit, he flagged down a bus full of the Army Band members headed to National Airport. When he told them he needed to get to the metro, they volunteered to take him to the airport metro stop. He then had to navigate many metro stops and switch from the blue to the red line part way through, but he made it and arrived at the hotel at the same time we did. WHEW!

That night we hit challenge number 3, when the kids tired of looking at lit up monuments! They had had a long day of history, their brains were fried, and they were very restless. We were losing our audience! So we switched it up and drove over to the parking lot at the end of National Airport where the planes fly REALLY close to the ground as they land. Everyone poured out onto the grass, laid on their backs and had an exciting night watching planes land. . . it saved the evening.

The last day was our last challenge as it was quite chaotic getting 60 kids plus chaperones to their early morning flight. . . but we made it. Barely. Standing at the gate (because you could do that back then), we finally got the last kid down the jetway in the nick of time. After the agent closed the boarding door, Patty turned to me and said, "I have three boarding passes left." All we could do was wait for the call to hear if they were missing some kids. Luckily that call never came. Turns out back then you could easily board a plane without a pass, or maybe the gate agent was flustered too!

The trip turned out to be a HUGE success, and we got many letters from the kids about what a wonderful time they had, although one girl asserted that "her T-shirt gave her a rash." I thought about telling her to wash it first, but I'm not sure a Souvenir City T-shirt could stand up to that kind of harsh treatment.

I learned so many lessons from this trip. Would I leave a kid alone at Arlington National Cemetery again? Probably not. But we had certainly prepared him for getting lost. We often underestimate the complexity of information that people can learn and follow correctly, but if a 12-year-old can navigate the metro system in a new city, you can probably relax on over-managing the people on your team when giving them critical information. They'll figure it out. Also, pay attention to the signs that their brains are fried. Sometimes people just need a break to watch planes land.

Oh, and remember, there's always a price: either you pay more for quality, or you get a discount that comes with a rash.

Jan has shared her customized humor keynotes with thousands of associations and corporations, and she is the author of 2 books: "Finding the Funny Fast" and "Convention Comedian." She was also featured in the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, and the Huffington Post.

Feedback from recent events:

*"Jan's presentation was a great conclusion to our conference. She meshed her life experiences and hilarious humor to entertain our attendees. **She was great to work with and did a wonderful job of making her content relevant to our meeting guests.** There is no doubt that we will be working with Jan in the future."*

*"Jan's ability to perform to the audience and engage them in relevant change was beyond compare. **The keynote was delivered with humor, fun, and meaning. Her keynote was the delight of the event.**"*

*"We thoroughly enjoyed having you join us, and **your presentations were FANTASTIC! We have already received some positive feedback, and I'm sure there is much more to come in the days ahead.** I appreciate all that you do to bring humor and happiness to others, thank you for sharing that with us in Oklahoma."*

Connect with Jan on Social Media:

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About Jan . . .

Jan McInnis has written for Jay Leno's Tonight Show monologue as well as many other people, places, and groups radio, TV, syndicated cartoon strips, and even guests on the Jerry Springer show (her parents are proud). For over 20+ years she's traveled country as a keynote speaker and comedian sharing her unique and practical tips on what business leaders can learn from comedians (no, it's not all about telling jokes). She can be reached at www.TheWorkLady.com, Jan@TheWorkLady.com or contact her assistant Brenda@TheWorkLady.com 703-581-7604