

## FOX HUNTING FOR \$200, ALEX.



You just never know when you may appear on the Jeopardy game show with Alex Trebek. So just in case, you need to accumulate a ton of trivial information. I'd never been on a foxhunt before – not many people in these parts have. But what if fox hunting was the Final Jeopardy category?

Well, I'm fully prepared now. Yes, I recently went on my first foxhunt – in Kansas no less! Thanks to my brother & sister in-law and the Mission Valley Hunt Club (MVH), if that subject ever comes up in conversation or on Jeopardy (hopefully the Daily Double!) I'm a cinch to win.

What originally started as a business trip and brief visit with relatives quickly turned into a 5-day adventure including a tour of the countryside south of Kansas City in Miami County, Kansas. There isn't much out there but rolling hills, a lot of cows and a few foxes.

It is rather amazing the things you discover about a place if you're willing to get off the beaten path. Did you know that the seeds of our

great Civil War were sown in Miami County? The infamous abolitionist John Brown of Harper's Ferry fame was born there. And just down the road from my brother-in-law's 40 acres is the Summerset Winery, featuring Buffalo Blush wine – what makes a buffalo blush anyway?

My relatives (Peggy & Bruce Kelly) call their “farm” Kellyglen and they share it with six horses, six cats and two dogs. Both Kellys are avid horse lovers and belong to the MVH. As the crow flies, the Club is only a few miles north of Kellyglen and they could “hack” to the hunt if they chose too.

We didn't “hack” to Kansas, which means basically to ride instead of trailering your horse to a location; we took the big silver bird called Northwest Airlines to MCI (Kansas City Airport). Now MBS (Midland, Bay City, Saginaw) makes sense but MCI?

My wife and I got through security without incident (no trips to the penalty box) and even hit the jackpot with upgrades to the more spacious exit row seats – no extra charge. We discovered from recent air travel that flight attendants are actually showing a sense of humor again – something that was definitely lacking since 9/11, security level orange, multiple layoffs, cutbacks and union strikes.

I'm basing this observation on the instructions issued to all passengers prior to takeoff from DTW (that's the Metro Detroit Airport). As we sat there patiently (granted most passengers were half asleep), the flight attendant said over the microphone, “It's way too early to be doing anything but please take the security card out of your seat pocket and pretend to follow along.”

She continued, “If the plane should suddenly lose cabin pressure an oxygen mask will drop down. If there is a child or someone acting like a child next to you stop screaming, then secure your own mask first. Its up to you whether you help the person acting like a child.”

Our instructions ended with: “this is a non-smoking flight but if you absolutely must smoke, use the exit doors on the left. If you can keep it lit while out on the wing, we'll let you smoke. Thank you for your cooperation and have a nice flight. Bye-bye.”

Now that's my kinda flight attendant. Not one person asked me to open the exit door to go out for a smoke. Oops, sorry for digressing – back to the hunt.

Actually we didn't go on an “official” hunt, as the formal hunt season was a week away. We were invited to attend the last “cubhunt”, which

the Master Huntsman (MFH) uses to train the young dogs (which they are NEVER called).

I soon discovered I literally knew nothing about foxhunting because everything I thought I knew was wrong. First, as I just said in the last paragraph, I kept referring to the smaller pack of four-legged creatures as dogs – wrong – they are hounds. And those bright red-colored jackets – wrong – they are scarlet coats.

There are whole books on fox hunting etiquette and everyone at MVH quickly learned I'd never read any of them. I expected someone in a red jacket to yell "release the hounds" and the dogs would all start barking – wrong – scarlet coat, no one yells and a hound doesn't bark. He opens, throws his tongue or speaks.

The Master Huntsman blew his horn and off they went or rather they were "cast" to "covert" (pronounced cover). I expected to hear "tally-ho" – wrong – that only occurs when someone on the staff or in the "field" (the other large group, two-legged creatures on horseback or on their butts if they fall) spots the fox.

That's another thing...foxhunting is an expensive hobby to begin with but especially costly for amateur riders. One doesn't fall off their horse. They have an "unscheduled dismount" resulting in a "cropper fee." You pay into a fund for each embarrassment – a sort of humiliation tax.



We didn't wear colors but rather "ratcatcher" attire and I chose to be a "hilltopper" instead of going on "runs" and jumping "coops." However, I did appreciate watching the "whippers-in" and the "Field Master" had an exceptionally fine Irish liqueur in her traditional hip flask.

It was a very enjoyable experience probably never to be repeated. I don't think I made a complete fool of myself. If I got another invitation and ponied up the "capping fee" you might see me "gone away" if I don't "go to ground" first.

To be honest, the etiquette and terminology does grow on you and at least the hounds didn't "riot." You'd better look it up. Someday you might be on Jeopardy.

