

It could have been nice...

Recently my wife and I traveled to Chicago from Columbus to attend a writer's workshop, and to give me a chance to pitch my first novel to some literary agents in attendance there. We also wanted to catch a ballgame at Sox Park, since the Cubs were out of town, and do some other touristy things while there. My wife had not traveled much and I promised her a nice lunch on a moving train, and a scenic trip through the countryside down to the city. Not to mention a ballgame, and a chance to see some of the sights of the big city.

It could have been nice...but the train was an hour and a half late and we got hungry waiting.

It could have been nice...but as we boarded the train and sat in the dining car we were told it was closed, they didn't have any food anyway, so please get out so we can clean. We couldn't even get a glass of water.

It could have been nice...but we were told to go sit in the observation car and get some lunch from the café in the car below it. Navigating those steep narrow steps on a moving train is a real adventure for senior citizens. The lack of signage mostly ensures that you will get lost on a trip to whatever bathrooms were not currently closed.

It could have been nice...but the café was down to a half dozen beers and a few bags of chips.

It could have been nice...sitting there in the observation car eating our chips and drinking our beers, watching the countryside through the dirty windows, but we were kicked out of there shortly after because they wanted to clean it.

It could have been nice... when we checked into our \$200 hotel room but it was small and old. Presidents had stayed there they said, but not since the 40s, which apparently corresponded to the last time the place was remodeled.

It could have been nice...but since we arrived late we missed the start of the ball game.

It could have been nice...because I caught a foul ball at the game but the crowd booed my Cubs shirt and World Series Championship hat when I held up the ball, but then cheered when I handed it to a young kid in a Sox jersey.

It could have been nice...but the workshop was inconvenient, simplistic, and the agents arrogant and condescending.

It could have been nice...since Buckingham Fountain in Grant Park was in full display, but even a kiddie ice cream cone will cost you five bucks.

It could have been nice...at Navy Pier eating super at Harry's Cary's outdoor café, but some religious zealots, with apparently nothing constructive to do, held signs and stood in the walkway agitating people about *Coming to Jesus*.

It could have been nice...but cab rides were a life threatening adventure, with Somalian, Syrian and Ethiopian cab drivers trying to kill each other over fares, both in and out of their cars.

It could have been nice...seeing the fishes at the Shed, but a \$30 ticket to the Oceanarium did not mean that you wouldn't be kicked out when the show started. Another five bucks please.

It could have been nice...because the Sunday return trip was on-time, but the waiting rooms were overcrowded and a trio of pigeons walking around eating scraps around the seats and from the dirty floors.

It could have been nice...but the boarding process was disorganized, and gave the feel of being loaded into cattle cars, similar to my experiences in the Army. Moo!

It could have been nice...as we were looking forward to having our super on the return trip, but we were told to stay in our seats for ticket collection and then later that the dining room was closed, and to try the café.

We did speak with your very nice young conductor Zack, but he could only provide some sincere but ineffective condolences, your contact information, and a *snack pack*. And also a warning that a bad review could lead to privatization.

So I have a new motto suggestion for all of you at Amtrak: ***"It could have been nice."***