

IT IS A PLEASURE

It is about a ninety minute flight from Los Angeles to Reno. I am flying Southwest, that bare-bones efficiency which keeps the other airlines honest, sitting fairly near the front. Over the San Joaquin Valley, then the fast of the Sierra Nevadas still under heavy packed snow at the end of April.

Getting up to deplane I see a man a few seats forward who seems familiar, then his pock-marked neck makes his identity a sudden certainty: James Olmos. Edward James Olmos, who played the tragic lead of an amazing movie about Hispanic Los Angeles, "American Me," after which he was a man marked for death by the Mexican mob. What is he doing with no body guard in this 100 % coach flight which has not even a hint of first-class? I am glad to see that he is still alive.

We wait for the door to be opened, then all work up the passage-way into the Reno terminal. You can't quite hear the sounds of the electronic poker machines, then you can. Welcome to Nevada.

A few people meet the plane, among them a tall thin blond man in his early twenties who brightens at the sight of Olmos. (Yes, it is he!) They shake hands, and the young man says:

"So glad to see you. Here," he gestures to a young woman, "I want you to meet my friend Debbie Martinez."

He pronounces Martinez as all Anglos do, flat and hard. James Olmos turns to her, reaches out his hand and speaks softly:

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Debbie Martinez."

He speaks with warmth and elegance and rhythm and gives *Debbie Martinez* the gracious Spanish sounds it deserves.

I move on, my short holiday already a success, filled with pleasure at having witnessed such poetry, certain that the fortunate young woman will carry this scene with her for the remainder of her life. Perhaps she won't quite convey the magic to people when she tells the story, but I am sure by the time she has grandchildren she will have it down. I walk away with music playing in my ear:

*It is a pleasure
To meet you
Debbie Martinez.*

Michael Waterman
Los Angeles
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