

A Small Hotel (2011)

Houston Hodges, for Writer's Corner, WLRH Radio Huntsville, AL USA

I wish you could see the tab from the place where I stayed on my vacation. The bill is in great detail. Amenities mount up; playing computer games costs varying amounts, depending on the game's popularity. Meals are pricey, at six to nine dollars, but rates for the room are a bargain, at only \$3.99 a night, which may have something to do with the fact that it also serves as the guest room in the home of my daughter and her family. Room service extras are limited: a "Personal Pizza" or a "Baguette Sandwich" costs \$2.49, and something called a "Hidden Hot Dog" is \$1.49. Turns out that those are dishes which can be prepared by the hotelier, who is my eight-year-old grandson, Joe. Payment is made by so many tickets, rather than cash, and when a guest runs out of tickets, all he has to do is apply and a new supply will be counted out from the big roll that Joe got for Christmas.

Perhaps the outstanding feature is the plastic baggie labeled, "For body cleaning," containing several of those little hotel samples, soap and lotion and such. Each is marked with a hand-written label bearing the monogram of the hotel, and the instruction, "Leave at hotel." When your stock of supplies is pretty limited, you don't want some greedy grandfather absconding with things. The bag is six tickets, a pretty steep tab.

Everything is printed in neat and orderly pencil. A welcoming letter to the "Dear Customer," documents managerial experience that is reassuring: "I have been to Texas, Duluth, and South Dakota," and then he adds, "I have gone to hotels and have learned from them."

As I analyzed this, I was pretty impressed. Joe is doing the very best that he can to make my stay comfortable and enjoyable. The others in his family have their own ways to make me welcome, but Joe does his part superbly. He says when he grows up he may be a policeman, or a cook, or actually go into the hotel business he's practicing with me. However he ends up, I hope he stays as

responsible and as generous as he is now.

Grandpop Houston Hodges is Parish Associate at the Big Cove Presbyterian Church, in the Hampton Cove area. Worship is at 9 and 11.