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ENTERTAINING FOR NONPROFITS AND CHARITIES

Retired local reporter keeps busy

By Miriam Segaloff

For nearly 40 years, Bill Cohen was the voice of public radio and television at the Ohio Statehouse.

Since his retirement in 2013, Cohen has continued to use his voice to entertain and support central Ohioans and their causes.

Cohen and his wife Randi have about a dozen themed, multi-media shows they put on, many as fundraisers for local non-profits. One of the most well-known is the 1960s coffeehouse show, but there are shows for Valentine's Day, the early civil rights movement, American patriotism, aging, a John Denver tribute, hopes and wishes for New Years, time and memory, and more.

"Especially as I grow older, I love the team we've become," Cohen said. "I provide the music and singing and she does all the sound equipment and the video and figures out ways to distribute it over the internet."

That last part, Cohen said, has become especially important since COVID-19 came on the scene. Not only has it curtailed their travel plans, it forced them to cancel dozens of shows they already had scheduled in 2020 and 2021. Instead, many of them moved online to Facebook. Their Thanksgiving show drew hundreds of live viewers and thousands more watched a recording later, Cohen said. Other times, he said he will stand in his front yard and friends and neighbors will pull up a lawn chair to listen to an impromptu concert.

Cohen, said since he started performing in 1986, he has performed locally at churches and synagogues and dozens of nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Admission to his charity shows is usually a \$10 or \$15 donation. Most often, Cohen said, the Columbus Folk Music Society, the Alzheimer's Association, Southern Poverty Law Center, Habitat for Human-



Bill Cohen performs



Bill and Randi love the Clippers



Bill and Randi on a glacier in Alaska

ity or the Mid-Ohio Food Collective are beneficiaries.

In addition to performing, Cohen, 73, is involved with a number of local organizations. He and Randi volunteer with the Columbus Folk Music Society, helping organize the annual Columbus Folk Music Festival. He also conducts interviews for the Columbus Jewish Historical Society's oral history project. He and Randi walk three to six miles a day, depending on the weather and before COVID, he played racquetball four mornings a week.

"I am loving retirement," said Cohen. "It's given me even more time to do the things I love to do, even when I was working as a reporter.

Those things include spending time with his wife, Randi on long, daily walks, going to Columbus Clippers minor league baseball games, hosting backyard bonfires and traveling around Ohio, the country and the world.

"I never let work get in the way of any bucket list I may have had," Cohen said. "I always say, if I had wanted to climb Mount Kilimanjaro, I would have done it 25 years ago when I was younger. I loved my job as a reporter, but now I love not being a reporter."

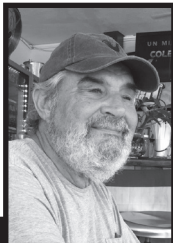
The Clintonville couple has been to Spain – Randi's favorite destination – a number of times. Cuba, Israel, Mexico, Costa Rica and Canada are some of the couple's other international destinations.

"Besides being able to travel freely again, the other thing we are really looking forward to in 2022, assuming COVID fades away, is returning to our man in-person concerts we produce."

Cohen, who grew up in Bexley, said one of his favorite ways to share music, especially during the pandemic's various stages, is by lighting a backyard bonfire and inviting friends to come over.

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For the Love of Travel



Aaron Leventhal

All Aboard

For the Canadian train adventure

With the coronavirus pandemic continuing through 2021, international travel for Americans has been essentially grounded. Fortunately, my wife Beth and I discovered a unique way to celebrate our 25th anniversary and my 80th birthday.

After researching the acclaimed VIA Rail Canada's four-day, 3,000-mile train ride across its western provinces, we learned its classic Canadian passenger train currently operates on a reduced once-a-week schedule from Toronto to Vancouver or vice versa. We signed up when we learned we could cancel our reservation up to the day before departure without any financial penalties.

As seasoned travelers, we have enjoyed many day-long train trips throughout Europe. However, a non-stop overnight journey

across thousands of miles of scenic wilderness would be an entirely new experience. This was confirmed when we entered our tiny cabin with only two large chairs that were replaced at night with bunk beds, a small sink, toilet, and a shower down the hallway.

Surprisingly, Beth remarked daily that she was completely relaxed and comfortable in her upper bunk bed as the train rolled on through the night. "It was like being gently rocked to sleep in a cradle. I love it." She also probably appreciated a break from my snoring and hogging the blankets.

A confession: This odyssey is not for tourists seeking or accustomed to the comforts of luxurious resorts and cruise ship amenities, including nightly entertainment. This memo-

orable journey requires each traveler to create their own good time, and that was fine with us. We brought books, a Scrabble game, a chess set, and playing cards that kept us occupied as the sleek Canadian leisurely rolled day and night through northern Ontario's dense pine forests, along Manitoba and Saskatchewan's expansive prairies and past Alberta's majestic Rockies. On the early morning of the fifth day, we arrived in British Columbia's vibrant and culturally diverse Vancouver to conclude our holiday with a two-day stay before returning to Columbus to cheer on the Buckeyes.

What to do:

When not dining, drinking or napping we spent serene hours in domed, elevated sightseeing cars with comfortable seats and large wrap-around windows that brought the delightful passing scenery intimately into view. There were occasional brief stops to drop off and pick up passengers in remote rural communities. Unfortunately, there was no time to explore, but we could get out, stretch and breathe some fresh air.

We learned the primary purpose of the train was to serve residents and business people in these remote regions, with tourism a secondary objective, which made our journey kind of quaint in a weird way. Not having a car was a distinct advantage. No one had to concentrate on driving and miss the scenery, and we didn't have to stop around every curve to take a photograph. There also are lounges scattered throughout the train to relax, play games, sightsee and visit with fellow travelers who



The glass-enclosed dome car offers glimpses of natural wonders for more than 2,000 miles from Toronto to Vancouver



Aaron and Beth dine on three excellent, freshly-prepared meals daily

were mostly from Canada, many from French Quebec, and also from Europe and the U.S.

Dining and Drinking:

We filled the days happily dining on white tablecloths with lovely views of passing landscapes. The meals were expertly served by a charming and professional Canadian staff, who truly tried to please their guests. Outstanding freshly-prepared meals included hot cereal, cranberry orange pancakes and omelets for breakfast; sandwiches, pastas and salads for lunch; and delicious dinner entrees ranging from grilled salmon and prime rib to vegetarian lasagna and pan-fried trout. The

most popular activity after dinner was to retire to the cozy bar and lounge for a drink and friendly conversation.

The Tab: The fare was under \$1,500 per person based on double occupancy; \$2,300 for a single. (Our dollar currently is worth 20 percent more than the Canadian currency.) It includes the fabulous, four-day train ride, accommodations in the sleeper car and

three outstanding meals daily. If you add a couple of days in Toronto and Vancouver, the vacation is both an outstanding experience and a bargain.

Travel Tips: You can save a few hundred dollars by departing from Vancouver. The train leaves on Monday afternoon (as opposed to Sunday from Toronto), and the itinerary provides more daylight time to enjoy the scenic wonders of British Columbia and the Canadian Rockies. Arrival in Toronto is early Friday afternoon, allowing the option to fly home or enjoy a delightful weekend in this cosmopolitan city.

It is best to avoid booking the trip from June through September, when trains can be crowded, chaotic, and out of sync with the tranquility of the scenic surroundings. The on-board staff recommends travel from October through May when the crowds have diminished, it's less crowded in the glass-domed cars, bars and dining room, and the staff are more relaxed and eager to please.

If the pandemic has stressed you out to a point of near depression, this might be the ideal trip for you.

Accommodations in Toronto and Vancouver:

We enjoyed our stay in Toronto at the **Yorkville Royal Sonesta**, 220 Bloor Street West (800-766-3702), just a 2-minute walk to the Royal Ontario Museum currently offering an excellent exhibit on Great Whales.

In Vancouver, the **Listel Hotel**, 1300 Robson Street (800-663-5491), is an intimate boutique hotel noted for its art collection in both public spaces and hotel rooms. Its Forage restaurant serves delicious farm-to-table cuisine with local ingredients.

Columbus travel columnist Aaron Leventhal is a frequent contributor to Senior Times. Pictures are by Beth Ervin Leventhal.



Travel writer Aaron Leventhal enjoys riding along English Bay in Vancouver's Stanley Park on a bicycle rented from Spokes, near the park entrance.

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