

I spend a good deal of time in airports and in flight to different destinations around the country. Perhaps, to some, it might seem glamorous to fly here and fly there at 32,000 feet over the United States.

Glamorous? I don't know about that, but there are some things about airline travel I enjoy.

It's a good time to work and I always find it cool to look out the window and see the landscape pass by. Although we're moving at about 500 mph, it looks as if we're slowly passing over what lies below. From that vantage point, it gives me the opportunity to look far and wide.

Over some parts of the country I see forest. Over other parts I see cities. These are much easier to spot at night when their lights twinkle through the atmosphere. However, over much of the country I look down and see something that makes me smile. Doubtless my seat mates find me a quiet but curious companion.

Often below I see the patchwork of fields, roads and circles of American agriculture. It looks like a quilt or a tapestry of sorts. Different colors and textures blend into a mosaic in natural light and shadow.

In certain parts of the country I distinguish section lines and farm houses spread distant from one another, along with barns, outbuildings, corrals and elevators. If I look closely, I can observe drainage on the property witnessed sometimes by scars that knife jaggedly from the high spots to the lower ones. Creeks meander through some of the land on their way to somewhere else.

What I also see, at least in my mind's eye, are the stories that preface what I observe today.

I see the struggle of generations toiling long hours for too little return, relative to the effort. I observe where someone's great great grandparents staked a claim and set about the hard work of trying to build something lasting for their kids, their grandchildren, their great grandchildren, and so it goes.

While flying along and looking down I can imagine the tales that created the legacy I see below.

The rains, the droughts, the winds and snows all played a part. Some years might have been challenged by pests like grasshoppers. Other years may have been challenged by an early freeze, a late snow or a hailstorm. Farming and ranching are always tough and Mother Nature, as the families who work at it know, can be whimsical and hard.

But somehow, the hearty people who work the land keep at it. And, because I eat, I'm glad they do.

They get up each morning, yawn, stretch and rub sleep out of their eyes. After a cup of joe, they pull on their boots and tie the laces. If it's cold, they'll put on coveralls over a sweatshirt with a hoodie. Then they'll typically put on a cap of some sort because, of course, livestock don't care much for bed hair.

Then, out they'll go and out is important because that's where most of agriculture still takes place. Perhaps, if it's chilly, their breath will turn to frost or, if it's not, beads of sweat will soon darken the sweatband of the cap they've put on. If it's raining, folks try and retreat to those chores in the shop they've been putting off until such a day occurs.

Looking out that airplane window, I can watch crops mature with the seasons. I might see an orchard that blooms bright in the spring, having branches later bent by fruit ready to pick. I might see a wheat field green and lush with spring moisture, mature into golden bounty. And then, after harvest the whole thing starts over.

Doubtless, some of the other passengers on my flight look at the earth below as well. They may not have the affinity for agriculture I do and may not see what it is I see. They may consider what I view to be nothing more than passage from one place to another. Some will leave the flight recalling little of what was below because to them, and their experience, they've seen something they'll refer to as "flyover country". If they ever talk of it.

I've surveyed something a bit different than my companions. Having a connection to land and agriculture, I've viewed something important and truly special.

On my flight, I've beheld America.