

Flight Risks

I have told this story so many times with and without my partner in this adventure, Anna, my very best friend. I prefer telling it with Anna as we have a tendency to escalate the excitement and exaggerate the physical aspects when we're telling how the OTHER one acted and re-acted to our situation. Alas, only one of us is a scribe, so I get to tell my version here.

Anna and I were delighted when we discovered we had each received a “too good to be true” offer for a hotel stay of five nights on Maui, rental car, AND resort allowances for under \$800. We reviewed every detail, and the husbands, Don the lawyer, and Barry the MBA, looked over all the documents, and basically said, “hey let’s go”. We’d stay in sister hotels only a walkway from one another. It seemed like it would be a perfect trip.

Anna and Don always fly separately so as not to leave behind their adult children as orphans should a disaster occur. Since I am pretty much a white-knuckle flyer believing that every bump or rough patch will end in death, I thought their practice was not all that odd. Barry did, but didn’t buck the three to one vote. So we made reservations on Aloha for the guys and Hawaiian Airlines for the ladies. Too bad the six foot husbands got the crampy 737---it’s just the way it worked out.

We arrived on Maui within minutes of each other, picked up our respective car rentals, checked into our rooms, and then sat at the bar overlooking Black Rock marveling at how lucky we were. We had a delightful time---exceptional meals, some snorkeling, and lots of poolside drinking---Don tried every specialty drink on the menu---pink, powder blue, smoking, rimmed with pineapples, strawberries, *whatever*. Threw macho to the wind he did!

The only thing that marred the week was Barry’s pneumonia. He was diagnosed the day before we left home *after delaying a visit to the doctor by at least a week*. This nurse was not at all sympathetic, though I did assure him we were all very willing to reschedule. However, he insisted on going as planned. He was placed on a powerful antibiotic, and basically felt pretty lousy most of the week. (The post-script to *that* is another story).

By the end of the trip I knew Barry was looking forward to getting home. I was also feeling that five days away was just enough. Our son Michael, who has epilepsy, was experiencing some breakthrough seizures, and I didn’t want his sister Meaghan solely responsible for any longer a time period. She had direct access to his wonderful doctor; but enough is enough, she’s a sister not a parent.

So...we bid good-bye to Maui proper after a nice breakfast in Lahaina, dropped the rental cars, then killed some time in an airport restaurant before parting with the guys and heading to our separate terminals. The Aloha flight was scheduled to leave 15 minutes before the flight that would bring Anna and I back to San Diego.

I like to travel light when boarding the plane, so I had only a purse with me. Anna, on the other hand, had a rather large Tommy Hilfiger limey green bag (I really wondered how it passed muster at those bins that measure the appropriate carry-on size). But whatever, she had it and it was packed to the rim with “stuff”. We sat in seats at Gate 38 waiting to be called to board our plane. It was then that Anna noticed her portable DVD player and the 12 movies she brought with her were not in the jam-packed bag. Why did she bring 12 movies when she was going to Hawaii??? Don’t ask----that’s Anna. Anyhow, Anna was kind of freaked----“they must be stolen by now--- what’ll I tell Don---I can’t believe I left them.” “Anna, call the hotel “, I said. “Tell them you think they were left in the room. They can check in housekeeping and if they find them, they will send them to you. AND-- **DON’T TELL DON**”!

While Anna was locating the whereabouts of her possessions, I decided to call Meaghan and see how everything was going. She related that at Michael’s neurology appointment earlier in the day, he’d actually had a seizure while the neurologist was examining him. She relayed that medications were being adjusted and that the doctor was working on moving up his scheduled stay in the Epilepsy Unit at the hospital in order to get the breakthrough episodes under better control. Now *I* was a bit unsettled and really anxious to get back home. *Why was our plane not boarding?*

Finished our conversations we settled back down at gate 38. Anna told me about the outcome of the DVD---she was happy. It was located. It would be mailed. I brought her up to date about Michael, expressing all the while that we couldn’t get back too soon as far as I was concerned.

Thankfully, twenty minutes after our scheduled time, we were called to board the jumbo jet. Taking deep breaths to curb my flying fears I approached the attendant scanning boarding passes...BEEP. Anna approached... BEEP. Down the length of the walkway we went, and another attendant looked at our boarding passes and directed us to the far aisle to take our seats. Anna hopped in front of me. She nicked a few heads with her Tommy bag as we made our way to row 15. She turned to face me when she realized some one was sitting in her seat. She said to me” they must have double booked the seat”. Can I see your boarding pass?” she said to the young teen. He showed her---she turned to me again with a puzzled, *what do we do* kind of look on her face. Then I said to our young man friend, “where are you going?”, as a sense of dread was starting to overcome me. “Seattle”, he replied. **“SHIT! WE’RE ON THE WRONG PLANE”**, I screamed as I raced back up the aisle-repeating over and over as I pushed through oncoming passengers, **WE’RE ON THE WRONG PLANE!!** I glanced back—Anna was several rows behind--“excuse me, excuse me, excuse me”, she exclaimed, as her lime carry-on nudged and bumped numerous seated and entering passengers, on her run up the aisle. Then, we were racing up the stupid walkway, every step exaggerated by the quietness-*thud- thud- thud*. My heart was racing too. *How in the hell did we get on the wrong plane?* I was starting to hyperventilate. Anna caught up to me on the walkway (runway for us), and we were both talking, shouting, panicking at the same time.

We arrived in the terminal where only minutes ago we and several hundred other passengers had gathered. *Silence*. Only a few Hawaiian Airlines workers were left and all their eyes were trained on the two noisy hysterics who emerged crackling, “where’s the plane to San Diego?!” Hands pointed to Gate 35. (OH---*now* I understood. We were scheduled to go back to San Diego on **FLIGHT 38**---obviously, we weren’t supposed to depart from **Gate 38**!) “The plane left”, one worker said flatly. “You must be the two whose names they kept calling”, someone said *almost* disgustedly. “Okay”, somewhat gathering our wits...“when’s the next flight?”. A reply came from someone-“those were the last flights out of this terminal today.”

Okay, I admit it. Full blown panic consumed me. I needed to get home to Michael. Barry was sick and he needed to see a doctor. There was more to it than pneumonia, I had thought all week. So...I began to cry, mumbling “I can’t stay here all night”. Sob. “I have to get home”. Sob. We can’t stay in the airport”. Sob. I even called Meaghan again-a real mistake. Now she was worried about her brother AND me. “Relax Mom, everything will be fine. Dad will be here”. *OH NO----Dad. How/what would we tell the husbands?*

Anna was scared witless by my behavior. In all the years she’d known me, through all of Michael’s emergencies and hospitalizations, she’d never witnessed me break. So...while I stood crying, Anna, with the green bag bobbing, raced from one departure screen to another yelling, “I have to get my friend home. **I’ll get you home Mary Lou**. I’ll find something”. Back and forth, back and forth---finally, settling by my crying side. At that moment, we were approached by a little, prim-faced supervisor, who extended her right arm toward us pointing, “You two are really starting to irritate me!” *Uh-oh I thought. This little bitch may be our only hope of getting off this island.* I determined I could sit and weep quietly. Anna turned to me with a shocked look and said emphatically, “no one has **ever** said that to me before”. I reached and pulled Anna down into the seat beside me. “Let’s calm down, and see what this one has to say.” The witchy one told us she would “work on some solutions”, and left us. We waited *quietly*-hardly daring to speak or even look at each other for a long time.

The supervisor approached us about forty minutes later. “I have two options for you.” “You can take the same flight you did not get on, tomorrow and we will not charge you additionally.” My head was shaking back and forth immediately, “OR for an extra \$125 each, we can get you on a Delta 10pm flight (this was now about 3 in the afternoon) to Los Angeles.” “We’ll take that one”, Anna said. Then looking at me she said, “My parents will pick us up—it’ll be like a field trip for them”. Anna’s parents lived in Torrance and it was true—I could imagine they’d view picking up the errant travelers as something of an adventure. The supervisor made the arrangements and while we weren’t feeling like she treated us all that well we thanked her effusively and began our journey once again to our destination.

We had to exit the terminal and enter another, going through security once again. I wondered, *would we be detained, even searched?* After all, we did board the wrong plane and our suitcases were on their way to San Diego. Unscathed, we ended up in the terminal where Delta departed. We scouted everything out-checking and double checking

our boarding passes for gate and flight numbers. (This one would be hard to confuse---two digit gates, four digit flight numbers. Then, we were off to find a place to spend a few hours and determine how to break the news to Barry and Don, that we were not fifteen minutes behind them.

We didn't want our husbands to be upset with us; nor did we want them to think we were a couple of nitwits. We called our daughters, Meaghan and Katharine---told them our flight plans, and tried to plot a way for them to break the news gently. Katharine was elected to tell her father "something happened" (*be vague*) and they (Moms) won't get in till the morning. Not very satisfied, but feeling we couldn't do any better, we settled in the bar for a couple of beers. By beer #2 we were howling with laughter over what had occurred. *How DID we do that? Isn't it the kind of scene you see on a sit-com knowing full well it can't happen in real life? And what was with that little agent anyhow---telling us we irritated her?* Anna tried Don's cell to leave a message so he'd know right after landing, that we wouldn't be meeting he and Barry in San Diego. For some reason, she didn't get through. Then, I tried Don's cell from mine. My message," Don, just wanted you to know our flight's been delayed-----VERY-VERY-VERY delayed." I hung up quickly as snorts of laughter quickly engulfed us. We proceeded to call a couple of friends who we thought might find our situation amusing. Our daughters certainly did NOT.

We boarded our correct plane and were seated in our correct seats at about the time Barry and Don arrived in San Diego. We had no idea how the news was broken nor taken. The flight across the Pacific was pretty non-eventful. We were exhausted, but all the emotion of the day would not allow us to sleep. We LOOKED as though we'd been up 24 hours when we arrived at LAX around 6AM. We headed directly to a coffee shop, and then hopped on the escalator to take us to the pick-up area where Anna's parents were to meet us. We were looking downward, all energy drained from us when suddenly we heard , "Anna Lee, Anna Lee" and turned to see Anna's mom excitedly waving her hands as she passed us going on the "up" escalator. We waited for her below. She was so excited she could hardly contain herself. "Oh girls, too bad you missed your plane". Wait; let me take your picture". (Oh no). "Okay-now go over and open the trunk and let me take your picture there". Anna's Dad greeted us with no less excitement, and for the ride to San Diego, as Anna had warned, we would engage in non-stop conversation about anything and everything. When we pulled up to my Del Mar home we were TRULY exhausted.

My family was seated at the kitchen table when we got there. Barry had a bit of a smirk and merely shook his head, and Meaghan filled us in on Don's reaction. Apparently, when Katharine told him the rather vague and convoluted version we had prepped her for, Don, in his booming voice said"NOOOOOOOOOOO. I'll tell you what happened." He faced his hands toward one another, made the talking motion and passed one hand forward, one backward---Lucy and Ethel, Lucy and Ethel, yak, yak, yak." Barry just looked across the table and in his characteristic dry way remarked," no more separate flights". Agreed", I said. *At least till the next time.*