

Traveling in good company

By Jeff Davidson

My daughter Valerie and I had finished a seven-day cruise in Alaska. We disembarked from the cruise ship at about 8:30 a.m. and took a long taxi ride to the Vancouver airport. When we arrived and saw the flight schedules, there was a possibility of taking off several hours sooner than our scheduled flight. After clearing security and making our way down the hall, we only had a few minutes to get to the gate (clear on the other side of the airport) to see if we could make the departing flight.

Even though we walked a considerable distance, apparently we still had many, many minutes before arriving at the gate. So, we devised a quick strategy. Val, 16 years old at the time, would handle both of our rolling luggage carts and walk the halls at a normal pace. I would sprint ahead to save some minutes and reach the gate attendants while there was still time

for us to board.

I ran down the hall for what seemed like an endless amount of time and finally reached the proper gate. When I arrived, I was panting heavily, had no luggage, appeared disheveled, and needed a moment to collect myself. I was dehydrated. I told the gate attendant that we would like to board this plane because it would save us three and a half hours of waiting around in the Vancouver airport.

NOT UP TO STANDARDS: The attendant looked at me, called someone else over, and both of them studied my ticket for a while. They looked at me again and then in an official tone, one of them said, "The plane is about to take off. We're not sure if there's room, so it doesn't look like it's a go." With that, I kind of collapsed into a heap. I was exhausted from the sprint and they had given me a perfunctory answer, not going through the normal motions of attendants who are sincerely

inquiring about any more room on a plane.

"It must be me. They're reacting to my hasty arrival, with no luggage, and no daughter to be seen... they are judging me as a security risk."

When all looked hopeless, into the lounge area and up to the gate attendants strode my daughter with our two luggage carts. With her infectious smile and high charisma, the gate attendants realized that everything I was said was true. I was here with my daughter, and we could save three and a half hours if they could seat us.

OPEN THE GATES: Suddenly, everything shifted. The gate attendants said that we could board the plane. I looked at Val, and she looked at me. She didn't realize what had happened, but I knew immediately. Two seats were available, not quite next to each other, but close enough. It was a triumph to be on that plane. We arrived in Chicago, had a nice time walking the halls there, and then boarded

our plane to Raleigh, getting home much sooner in the day than otherwise. Not all airport and airline stories are negative!

Jeff Davidson is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. He is an expert on work and life balance issues. His website is www.BreathingSpace.com.

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Letter from Deia: why I travel

by Gary Phillips

After a last-minute flight cancellation and over 24 hours of continuous transport, changing planes in Toronto, Frankfurt and Barcelona, we arrived on Robert Graves' sun-kissed and rock tumbled island off the Spanish coast. At the summer house of my friend Andre, who produces plays in London and New York. We've known each other since our teens. I love him and his whole riotous family.

From this table I can watch the sea while I write, the slow play of light and clouds above the long horizon, the azure water as it sifts and moves and changes under the sky. A ring of mountains surrounds us, where the trees are carob and cedar and caper, with yucca and rosemary and even agave blooming out of cleft and crevice.

The household is just beginning to stir, but we early ones are quiet and respectful of each others' privacy, making tea and cutting fruit, starting coffee, turning to novels and journals and the hesitant tentative beginnings of conversation, which within hours will become a strong communal stream and by evening a torrent of laughter, insights, feelings, advice, stories, suggestions and plans.

Yesterday was wet and cool, unheard of in August. We made a band of ten and walked over to the small town of Soller, six or eight miles away, navigating a path between the Serra de Tramuntana and the Iberian blue. We saw several sweeps of the sea, terraced olive fields and citrus groves, walking sometimes through peoples' side gardens and sometimes over goat fences, everywhere accompanied by a thousand years of stone walls, stone paths, stone

houses, stone huts decorated with solar arrays and lime green reservoirs.

About two miles out of Soller we lunched at an 18th century estate by the side of the path, the C'a Xorc Hotel. Fare was tender ceviche, fresh salads and a rich brothy paella with tiny clams, hake-fish, octopus and pork, all taken with about six bottles of a good white wine. Fortified, Jamie and Millie and I left the others to cars and walked down the mountain to Soller, crossing the small-gage railroad track near where it tunnels under the mountain. We met the train at a bridge near the town, seven wooden cars and a few passengers from Palma. The engineer waved and blew his whistle.

I felt suddenly happy, blessed by the sea, by good company, by the little town below us, by the friendly whistle of a lonely train on its way to the mountain.

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