

## Travel Log: STL to PHL

### January 12<sup>th</sup>

5:00 pm (Central) – I arrive at St. Louis airport (STL) looking forward to returning home to Philadelphia (PHL) from three-day business trip; stomach growls, haven't eaten since breakfast

6:35 – flight delayed one hour; recognize dozen or so passengers I flew in with on Monday

7:15 – board plane, get settled

7:20 – flight cancelled; some passengers change plans; wait sixty minutes for my luggage; annoyed, I call my wife to say I'll be home tomorrow morning

9:00 – check in at Airport Hilton, all restaurants closed, stomach snarls; room key doesn't work, frustration brews; return to check-in counter, assigned to another room

9:15 – finally inside room I drink two glasses of water; stomach says *Is this the best you can do?* Room is very hot though unit is set on OFF; remove clothes; switch air conditioner to max cold – nothing happens

10:30 – bedside table lamp will not turn off; *Can anything else go wrong?* Lamp is plugged in behind immovable bed; remove hot light bulb using wash cloth to protect fingers

10:40 – room heater comes on, blows loudly for few seconds then turns off. *Is there a ghost in here?* Set heater control on OFF, blower continues to cycle hot air on and off; eventually I fall asleep.

### January 13<sup>th</sup>

4:45 am– take hotel shuttle to airport; recognize fellow travelers from the night before; we're now on a first name basis

5:30 – flight delayed, more passengers give up

7:00 – flight takes off successfully

7:30 – pilot announces we are experiencing problems with ice build-up on wings or it could be the icing indicator light is malfunctioning; I recall my solution to bedside lamp problem the night before

8:00 – we return safely to STL; indicator light to be repaired; we are told to stay close because we will re-board shortly

8:30 – flight cancelled, all passengers are rebooked to 9:55 flight and told to wait at gate in case the flight can depart sooner

8:35 – deafening noise erupts behind 12' plywood wall causing my teeth to rattle; workers jack-hammering concrete, building new spaces for Chili's & Sam Adams Brew House

8:40 – more passengers give up and leave; original group of familiar travelers down to five

8:41– words of 1970s Eagles hit “Hotel California” pass melodiously through my head, “You can check out anytime you want, but you can never leave.”

8:49 – finish reading USA Today cover-to-cover; three-sentence update on bottom p.12 reads: Bush administration has given up looking for weapons of mass destruction. War fully justified anyway because Saddam had intent to obtain.

8:50 – I recall countless hours spent protesting against the buildup to war, calls to Congress and the Bush administration; once again the Quaker slogan *War Is Not The Answer* proves wise

9:30 – flight delayed to 10:45 due to heavy fog at PHL

9:31 – learn from airline personnel that no planes from STL have landed in PHL so far today; my spirit sinks to bottom of the Mariana Trench

9:35 – leave message on home phone saying I'm still delayed; concerned about missing my adult son's birthday visit later that afternoon

10:00 – light snowfall at STL, my new home away from home

10:05 – frank conversation with Air Force pilot trainer my age; he believes U.S. mission in Iraq is foolhardy, job of pilot much safer than foot soldier

10:30 – replacement flight crew arrives

11:00 – board plane; good news from our fresh pilot – landing slot in PHL has been moved up so we can leave as soon as we get through de-icing process

11:25 – loud banging sound on side of plane; flight attendant is calm; I am concerned

11:35 – plane takes off for PHL in heavy snowfall; I fall asleep

11:45 – pilot announces, “Problem with AC system. While it poses no safety problem, it prevents the plane from ascending to cruising altitude, therefore we do not have enough fuel to reach Philadelphia. We are returning to St. Louis for repairs.”

11:46 – I tell flight attendant this is our second return to STL this morning; she's never heard of two-in-a-row in nine years of flying

11:48 – optimism about getting home today descends to lowest point yet; *Are my fellow travelers star-crossed? Could it be me?*

11:55 – airplane approaches STL again; three inches of snow accumulation on runways

12:00 noon – we land safely and are told to deplane but stay at the gate, repairs will be quick and we will reboard

12:30 pm – two airplane mechanics exit the jetway shaking heads NO; airplane towed away for serious work; three male passengers wander off to airport bar

12:45 – airport announcement of another flight leaving right away for PHL from gate C3; two fellow travelers exit quickly and rebook for C3

12:46 – our pilot, visibly resentful, telephones management to complain; fellow passengers and I cheer him on

1:00 – PA announcement that our flight will be taking the plane that is ready to go at C3; passengers onboard C3 plane are required to deplane

1:05 – scowling look on faces of two familiar-looking deplaning passengers who head immediately to ticket agent to switch back to their original flight; I give them a thumbs-up

1:10 – interesting conversation with local St. Louis man regarding newly completed loft apartments available downtown; make mental note in case another flight aborted

1:15 – buy Ham ‘N Cheese sandwich in shrink-wrap labeled: Made-Fresh-Daily; stomach says *Is this the best you can do?*

1:20 – I board my third airplane today bound for PHL; plane sits at gate with no explanation for delay

1:50 – Claire, our flight attendant (we’re on a first name basis now), forgets to do the safety demonstration so I remind her politely

1:55 – pilot explains current delay – switching bags from plane to plane; seems that all the bags for Flight 5651 are on Flight 5773 and vice versa > go figure

2:00 – while asleep on previous flight I missed exciting details so Claire fills me in > after takeoff she noticed a constant roaring noise toward rear of plane and reported it to the pilot; pilot sent co-pilot back to investigate; co-pilot determined that an AC Pack had, in fact, blown off the plane, somewhere over Illinois most likely; hopefully it did not fall on something important

2:05 – new Flight 5651 pushes back for de-icing; no unusual noises this time; successful takeoff; I relax into my seat

2:50 – airplane breaks into bright sunshine above clouds, my spirits lift

5:20 pm (Eastern) – Flight 5651 descends into Philadelphia area as darkness spreads over East coast; I point out Limerick nuclear power plant near Pottstown to passenger sitting beside me

6:20 – safely on ground with my luggage; tune car radio to NPR; article entitled: “Airlines In Bankruptcy” entertains me all the way home.