

My Turn for the Target

By Karel Murray

I have decided it is my turn to take on all of the woes of mankind. It's an awesome burden and one I didn't even know I was scheduled to assume! By the time you get done reading this, I hope that you will feel your life has been a walk in the park. Even Brittany Spears would probably feel better after reading this.

Maybe not.

But, that isn't the point here. I figure if I write down the perils of Karel, my streak of bad luck will magically disappear. I don't want anyone else to assume this prodigious load... I just want it to go away.

As you all know, I do a large amount of travel across the United States. The last seven years have, for the most part, been uneventful. I've had my share of issues, but nothing worth writing home about. That is... until January 8th arrived.

All I wanted to do was get to Boise, Idaho. In Birmingham, Alabama, I had just concluded a fun engagement for Realty South who offered me wonderful hospitality and a great introduction to a state I had never been in. But, it appears that Alabama doesn't like for its people to leave once they arrive!

With a 6:30 AM scheduled flight, I arrived at the airport at 5:00 AM, eager and ready to go. With a look of dismay, the airline personnel informed me that my flight had been cancelled and the next (and my only option) was scheduled for 2:07 PM. Already wide awake, I parked myself in front of a pizza kiosk and worked on my computer in the middle of the terminal. At 1:00 PM, however, I'm informed that my plane has mechanical issues and expect to leave by 3:00 PM.

Two hours go by, with no mechanics in sight. Thankfully, my travel agent confirmed me on a flight leaving at 5:30 PM. My 2:07 PM flight eventually cancelled. Two for two.

As I begin the boarding process for the later flight, a man behind me falls down and thrashes in a full blown seizure. Everything stopped, including the boarding process until medical personnel arrived to assist him. We finally board the plane at 6:45 PM.

I'm relieved to know that thirteen plus hours later, I was finally on my way to Boise.

I connected in Denver. As I check the board for the gate, I see that my flight to Boise has been cancelled. A short, abrupt laugh erupts from my mouth and I realize that I must be in some sort of a time warp. Of course this can't be happening. The next flight they had me

scheduled on cancelled also. Finally, the last flight arriving at midnight in Boise actually took off. I think I slept the entire way believing that my trials were over.

Ha!

My baggage seemed to disappear. In fact, they never left Birmingham since they didn't know where I went with all the cancelled flights. I asked the shuttle driver to take me to Wal-Mart where I purchased a few overnight items and then we drove to the hotel.

The manager comes running out and shouts for me to stop where I was and get back in the van. He explains that they gave my room away because I hadn't checked in and yes, he knew I had guaranteed it with a credit card, but they needed the room. He advised me they had set up a room across town and to just go there with the voucher and everything would be fine.

15 minutes later (it is now 1:15 AM) I walk up to the registration desk of the new hotel and give them my voucher. They look at me blankly and ask what it was for. I told them a room has been reserved for me by the other hotel and they continued to have the blank expressions. There was no room at the inn. My eyes welled up with tears of exhaustion and I told them I was going to sleep in the lobby if they didn't locate a room for me. I needed at least 4 hours of sleep before my instructional event. I think it was the tear filled eyes that compelled them to give me a room. I collapsed.

Luggage appeared at 7:00 PM the next night and I was sound asleep by 7:30 PM.

Two days later I go to the airport to travel to Oklahoma City. During my connection in Chicago, my connecting flight to Oklahoma City is cancelled and I'm re-routed to another airline. Seven hours later, I finally touchdown, and learn that they don't know where my bags are. Again. This airline doesn't have a scanning device to track bags, so they told me they would call me if they found the bag. IF they found the bag? And, if they did find it, I would have to come back to pick it up since they didn't have a deliver service.

So once again I went shopping...this time for at least a clean shirt. I think a pattern was emerging here. When I arrived back in Iowa, my bags were misplaced once again and delivered 24 hours later to my home.

One week later, I have a 6:00 AM flight to Chicago with a connecting flight to Richmond. My 6:00 Am flight is cancelled while I'm standing there. No plane. I'm put on a 7:30 AM flight to Chicago. Once I'm in Chicago, I learn that high gale force winds are buffeting the east coast... and I was trying to get to Richmond, Virginia. All flights to Richmond on ALL airlines were cancelled... I had been in Chicago since 8:30 AM and was booked on a flight to take me back to Cedar Rapids. I spent 12 hours going nowhere.

Besides feeling mortified for my client, who has since rescheduled for March, I felt so unable to affect any control over my life, it was unsettling.

We finally board a plane at 8:45 PM that night. Everyone is relieved... High snows, ice... not the most comforting sight to see out of the window, but we were GOING! I was ready to take anything.

I'll never think that again.

About 15 minutes into the flight the captain announces that a stall warning has flashed up on his monitor – and not to worry since we were still in the air the engines were still running. But to be safe, we were diverted to Milwaukee, Wisconsin to do an emergency landing.

All I could remember thinking was “Now what?” I was never frightened, just annoyed. Even when we landed on one wheel and slid to the gate. On the runway there were six fire trucks and five police cars following us. I fully expected the doors to help the passengers execute a perfect emergency exit down slides. Obviously, it wasn't just a “little” thing.

I didn't care where the luggage was at this point. We were put up in a hotel and 2 other people drove with me back to Cedar Rapids, Iowa the next morning since flight arrangements couldn't be guaranteed.

Oh, yes... the luggage was lost again. This time it went to Richmond the next day and took another 24 hours to find me in Waterloo. It is getting more well traveled than I am.

This week, I'm to fly to New Mexico for another engagement. Waterloo and Cedar Rapids are hit with 13 inches of snow in a 24 hour period. Storms moving to Chicago and the east coast, and creating havoc in Denver. Once again, this morning, at 3:45 AM sharp, I receive a call from United that my 6:00 AM flight has been cancelled (the plane never arrived from Denver) and I was rescheduled for a 1:39 PM departure.

It is now 2:30 PM and we are still waiting for our flight from Chicago. I have only one option of making a flight to New Mexico at 5:30 PM in Chicago. This flight is the beginning of a three city run through February 15th.

I have to believe that everything will run its course. That the target on my back will be lifted in a high wind and the sun will come out shining on my most deserving head.

I love working with the people I've come to know across the country. My client has told me to stop worrying... there isn't anything I can do about the weather and just to stay safe. It's about priorities.

So my priorities include a complete change of clothing, makeup and hair products that are in a travel bag that never leaves my side.

Defensive travel. The only way to go!

Funny thing... my client reminded me that there is nothing I can do about the weather and since that was the case, just to sit back, take what comes and we will deal with the issue of not being able to arrive if it comes up.