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## Oops! I did it again

By Alison Burns



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Yes, I completely overlooked the significance of the fourth Wednesday in November when around 65 million Americans make their way back to their childhood homes like spawning salmon. Unfortunately, not being a U.S. native, I have no instinctive grasp of the importance of Thanksgiving. It's like trying to explain Boxing Day to an American.

Some years ago I made the mistake of booking a late-November flight to Detroit, totally unaware of the nightmare awaiting me on my return journey the following Wednesday. I'd been proud of paying \$300 for direct flights but my husband - who loves to dive into our million air-miles - promised he could get it cheaper. And he did. Just \$11 to fly half way across the country and back.

What he didn't mention though, was that this would involve an incredibly long and noisy layover in Salt Lake City, perched on a hard plastic chair for hours, not daring to get up to use the bathroom or buy a coffee for fear I'd sacrifice my hard-won seat to the vultures hovering precipitously close by.

I texted my misery to my husband: "I could have walked it quicker than this."

My cheese-parer husband texted back one phrase: "\$11."

Watching the frazzled moms juggling unbelievable quantities of boxes, bags and babies, while the dads lingered several paces behind carrying nothing heavier than an iPhone, I swore I'd never again fly just before Thanksgiving. But somehow, last month, I found I'd done it again.

Too late to reschedule my flight back from London, I envisaged myself trapped in the middle seat for 12 hours, a fretful toddler in front of me and a happy drunk behind. To my left would be an excessively talkative passenger, with the aisle seat occupied by someone so deeply asleep it would be impossible for me to escape and stretch my legs when I felt the throbbing of an incipient DVT in my calves.

Airplanes are not healthy places: the things that have been discovered in seat-backs are beyond mention in a family newspaper. Remember never to eat directly off your tray table: some people confuse them with footrests. Don't walk around barefoot: every bodily fluid has landed on that floor. And never drink directly from the faucets: a 2004 EPA study that tested 158 aircraft ultimately identified 20 planes with either E.coli or coliform bacteria in their water supply.

But even though the number of airborne passengers this Thanksgiving reached their highest since 2005, some folks still needed a nudge.

It's late November when an elderly man phones his son to say that he and his wife are getting divorced. "We're sick of one another," he snarls. "Tell your sister." Ten minutes later, his furious daughter calls: "No way are we letting you break up our happy home. We're coming home to discuss this. Don't argue. We've already booked our flights."

The old man turns to his wife and says, "Okay, they'll both be here for Thanksgiving. Now what shall we do about Christmas?"

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