

Was This Engagement Meant to Be?

Author's Note: Having shared this amusing story with a handful of MAGCS members, I let myself be coaxed into writing about the two-week misadventure to South Carolina and Savannah, Georgia. I hope that my readers will see the humor in this, as I do now in hindsight, though at the time it was hardly funny to me.

My trip was to start out with a visit to my significant other's best friend with a new child in Sumter, South Carolina; best friend's husband is stationed at Shaw Air Force Base. We were to stay there for one week and then drive to Savannah, Georgia to visit my brother and his fiancé. The Monday night after the Super Bowl, I had plans to propose to my girlfriend in front of the fountain in Savannah's Forsyth Park. With the setting established, read on and enjoy!

Wednesday, January 21st. I bring my truck to the dealership because of a transmission problem; in turn the dealership gives me a courtesy car for a week, the estimated time they say it will

take to repair the truck. My vehicle has 38,000 miles on it, while the warranty only goes to 36,000 miles, as I later find out. The guys at the dealership, out of the goodness of their heart, inform me that they will not charge me for it; they will honor the expired warranty.

This is a good thing, considering the amount of money I have shelled out for the trip and ring. The courtesy car is a Chevy Cavalier, a far cry from what I am used to driving, and in my mind this is going to pose a problem in a few days when I need to pack the car for the drive to O'Hare Airport.

Monday, January 26th. I pack the car at 6:30 in the morning, trying to figure out how I am going to fit three big suitcases packed to the gills, a set of golf clubs, a garment bag for suits and a briefcase—and still transport three passengers in the car. The third person would be my assistant, who has offered to bring us to the airport and then return the car to the dealership where my truck is being fixed. As feared, this wasn't going to work. We get to my shop and my second assistant offers to drive us in his SUV. Now I am unloading everything from one vehicle and putting it into another; as I am doing this, it begins to snow. We start our

journey down the interstate to Chicago and with every passing vehicle, the words "I'll see you in the ditch down the road" come out of my second assistant's mouth. This

is the guy who drives 59 mph in a 65 speed zone and the snow is the kind that was blowing off the road, nothing to be concerned about at this point. As we get closer to O'Hare, the traffic increases and the full-sized mug of White Hen coffee I drank two hours earlier wants to make an exit. With my eyeballs crossed, I command my second assistant

to pull over at the upcoming oasis. Wouldn't you know it—the oasis is closed for renovation and won't reopen until May. Out of the corner of my eye, I spot a row of Porta-Johns. Somebody was thinking!

We get back on the interstate and arrive at the United Airlines terminal a short time later. We unload and attempt to check in via sky cab. As we await the attendant to check in our luggage, he says, "I'm sorry, Mr. Braasch, we are not the operating carrier of today's flight, U.S. Airways is. What you'll need to do is bring your luggage around the bend to the U.S. Airways terminal." So my girlfriend and I have to haul all of this luggage through the snow, slush and wind-chilled 10-

degree temperature. Neither of us is wearing gloves and the walk is anything but short. Frozen and wet, we eventually make it to the U.S. Airways sky cab. We knock on

NO CANCELLED
 NO DELAYED FOREVER
 NO CANCELLED
 NO ? ?
 NO CANCELLED, WE THINK
 NO WE'RE NOT SURE
 NO CANCELLED
 NO DOPS, NEVER EXISTED
 NO CANCELLED
 NO ON TIME, BUT WHO GOES THERE??
 NO CANCELLED TIL WE CANCELLLLL...
 NO DELAYED DELAYED AND POSTPONED
 NO CANCELLED
 NO DONT YOU WANT TO KNOW...



(continued on page 23)

the booth where the attendant is sleeping and he graciously jumps out of his warm environment to assist us. We inform him what happened; he loads all of our luggage onto a cart and brings us to the ticket counter. I tip him generously as he made every attempt to make us feel comfortable again.

The ticket agent takes our bags, but informs us that the second leg of our flight has already been cancelled due to an ice storm in South Carolina. We still want to get out of O'Hare because they are expecting 4" to 6" of snow tonight and we all know what that will lead to. We get our boarding passes and head to the gate. We are not sitting there long before the dreaded voice comes over the loudspeaker: "Flight 809 to Charlotte, North Carolina has been cancelled due to weather, please see your blah blah blah." We make our way back to the ticket counter in an attempt to reschedule our flights. All flights to the Southeast are cancelled until tomorrow due to the storm. So we reschedule our flights for early the next morning and learn that we need to retrieve our luggage from the baggage-claim area. After picking up our luggage, we head to the hotel board and courtesy phones to make arrangements for the night. We do this because we don't want to bother somebody to pick us up, and we don't want to have to wake up at 3:00 in the morning to return to the airport, especially with snow in the forecast.

We find a room at a Holiday Inn and jump on the next available shuttle. We arrive at the Holiday Inn and proceed to the check-in desk, where we are greeted by yet another individual trying to make our day better. As I am checking in, she asks if we were given a voucher for a free room because the flights were cancelled. I tell her that the airline would not give us one because it was a weather-related incident that caused the flights' cancellation. (To my readers: if this is not a true statement and the airline was trying to pull one over on me, please don't tell me different, I

don't want to know.) We get our room assignment for the evening; unfortunately it is located one floor below the one the hotel is renovating. The lady informs us that the construction workers would be quitting for the day soon. We get to the room and the noise of air hammers pounding on concrete is much louder than I anticipated. I utter the dreaded phrase, "What else can go wrong today?", fortunately nothing that a hot tub and several Bud Lights can't cure.

Tuesday, January 27th. I awaken to the sound of a snowplow rumbling by the window. We grab our



luggage and proceed to the hotel lobby to catch the shuttle back to the airport. Sure enough, the ground is covered with 4" to 6" of snow; I can only imagine what today would bring. We get to the U.S. Airways ticket counter and see that neither of our flights has been cancelled yet, though we are informed that our flight from Charlotte, North Carolina to Florence, South Carolina will probably be cancelled. This having been said, I ask if it is possible to go straight to Savannah, Georgia and pick up the rental car to drive to Sumter, South Carolina, our final destination. The ticket agent responds, "You have to fly to Charlotte because that flight is not cancelled." "Fine, book it," I say. "Can we at least

fly to Savannah from Charlotte so that we are not stranded at yet another airport?" "Sure," she says. We get our boarding passes and head to our gate. We are not there 15 minutes before a voice comes over the intercom, "Ladies and gentlemen, flight number such-and-such to Charlotte will be delayed by at least an hour because the flight crew is stuck in traffic due to last night's snowstorm, thank you for your patience." "What a surprise!" I tell myself. The flight crew arrives about an hour later and we begin to board the plane, where we sit for another 45 minutes while the deicing procedure is completed. This is a good thing; I am not going to complain about this. We taxi to the runway and surprisingly take off with no wait at all.

We arrive in Charlotte and pull up to the gate just as our connecting flight to Savannah is pulling out. We get off the plane and go to the nearest desk to reschedule our flight. While we are standing there, we notice that the flight to Florence, South Carolina never did get cancelled as we had been informed would probably happen, so we inquire if we might fly into Florence instead of Savannah because our drive would be much shorter. The guy behind the counter responds, "Sure, but your luggage is already in Savannah." I wonder how this is possible, considering that in every airport there are signs that clearly state

that if you check in one hour or less before your flight is supposed to take off, you can get on the plane but your luggage can't because it doesn't allot enough time for scanning your luggage. I had a similar incident last year where they yanked my luggage from the plane because I supposedly didn't check in at the gate. I was wondering how my current situation was any different. "Well, we need our luggage, Savannah it is." We have two hours to waste before our next flight takes off, so I figure this is a good time to straighten out the rental-car reservation. I get on the phone to deal with the same morons at Expedia.com that I dealt with yesterday and explain to

(continued on page 25)

them that I will be picking up the car in Savannah instead of Florence. This apparently is a difficult task for them to handle. They are going to have to cancel my reservation and make a new one, adding that because I am within the 24-hour window, I will have to contact Alamo directly. I call Alamo and explain to the lady on the phone what has happened; she in turn replies, "You need to go through Expedia." At this point, I'm biting my tongue trying not to say something I may regret later. I ask her if I can just rebook through her and that I would deal with Expedia later. She says, "Sure!" She turns out to be a pleasant lady to deal with and she makes my day by cracking a few jokes. Thank you! I call Expedia back and tell them to cancel the car; upon proof that all of our flights were affected by the weather, they do so at no charge. Word of advice, never book cars and planes through a second party, book with your air carrier and rental-car company direct! You'll thank me for this later.

It is now time to board our flight to Savannah. We get on the plane and arrive in Savannah a short time later; sure enough our luggage is there waiting for us. I proceed to the Alamo desk while my girlfriend stays with the luggage. At the desk, the attendant on duty won't rent me the car without proof that I am flying out of that airport. I start the walk all the way back to my briefcase to retrieve our flight itinerary. As I approach, my girlfriend opts not to say a word to me, knowing that I have developed a bad attitude in the past two days. I get the itinerary and walk back to the Alamo desk, unaware of what kind of hand gestures my girlfriend is making behind my back. We get the car, which is—ironically enough—a Chevy Cavalier. We load up and hit I-95 to Sumter, South Carolina, thinking that things can only get better because we are in charge of our own destiny. Wrong! We start to run into the remnants of the ice storm, no ice, just a salt-splattered windshield. I go to hit the windshield-cleaner button and guess what? There

is no windshield-cleaner solvent. Because the South is not used to this type of weather, gas stations don't keep a lot of windshield cleaner in stock. We are forced to drive the rest of our trip looking through a 6" by 6" clear spot in the windshield. I don't realize that I could have used water as a substitute. If I hadn't fried my brain the past two days, I may have thought of this.

We arrive in Sumter only to discover that the hotel where we had a reservation is the only hotel in the entire town that lost power due to the ice storm. Needless to say, we cancel



the reservation. All the other hotels are booked, so we wind up staying with my girlfriend's best friend on the Air Force base. They provide us with an air mattress to sleep on; it ends up completely deflating by 2:30 in the morning and now we are on a cold concrete floor.

Wednesday, January 28th. We wake up the next morning stiff as a couple of boards with only one thing on my girlfriend's mind. "We will find a hotel today!" She calls around town and finds a room at the Sumter Days Inn. "It's a whirlpool suite," the lady exclaims, "but the jets in the tub don't work." "Does it have a shower?" "Yes," says the lady. "We'll take it!" We check into the hotel knowing that we can sleep and shower without inconveniencing other people. We finally get a good night's sleep and wake up wanting to take a long, hot shower. One prob-

lem—I don't see a shower head mounted on the wall. I look down the wall back to tub level and see something that resembles a spray nozzle with a retractable hose; kind of like the one you would find in your kitchen sink at home. So much for the long, hot shower. We begin to shower with one holding the shower over the other one's head and then switching so that the other can bathe. Needless to say, your arm gets tired after awhile and this wasn't heightening our desire to stay in town any longer than we had to.

Friday, January 30th. We check out and head to Savannah a day early. The trip back to Savannah is without incident and so are the next couple of days. We sit back and watch the Super Bowl at my brother's house, joined by my head golf pro and his wife, who stop in for a couple of days on their way back from the PGA show in Orlando.

Monday, February 2nd. This is the day I am to pop the question. My girlfriend and I, along with my pro and his wife, spend the day in downtown Savannah checking out all the shops and drinking establishments. My brother meets us at a bar down there about 5:00 p.m.

While I'm in the bathroom and my girlfriend is picking up another round of drinks from the bartender, my brother slips the ring into my coat pocket. Once we all return to the table, my brother chirps up and says, "Why don't you and Jayme go get my car and bring it closer to the restaurant?" This is my cue to do my thing. We go to the car and start driving away from the restaurant; she, of course, asks, "Where are we going?" I reply, "Oh, I just want to show you this fountain in Forsyth Park." "Okay." We get to the park and begin to walk towards the fountain; we are halfway there when all of the sudden it starts to pour. Somebody up there really doesn't want me to do this. We continue to the fountain anyway, surprisingly without any resistance from her. We get to the fountain, water running and beautifully lit. I ask her

(continued on page 27)

to read a bronze plaque mounted on a pedestal next to the fountain so when she turns back towards me I will be on my knee. All I can do is stand there and think about how wet my knee is going to get. She turns around and I'm standing there looking like an idiot staring at the ground. She's ready to continue walking through the park when I say, "There's one more thing." I drop to my knee, wet to the skin, and pop the question. She says yes, even after all we've been through in the past week. Soaked to the bone, we head back to the car and proceed back to the restaurant. We all celebrate and make phone calls, heading back to the house a few hours later only to be presented with a bottle of Champagne and a cake by my brother's fiancé.

Tuesday, February 3rd. My brother, golf pro and I head to my brother's course to tee it up and play 18. We get about halfway through the round when I encounter a shot that has come to rest under a tree. I start my backswing and begin the downswing when all of a sudden the club stops dead in its tracks against a tree root. Needless to say, my wrist is in pain for the remainder of the week. I feel I can tough it out until we get back to Wisconsin instead of dealing with out-of-state insurance issues. It turns out that I pulled the tendons in my left wrist and must wear a brace for some time.

Monday, February 9th. Time for the flight back. We head to Savannah International Airport and check in at the United Airlines counter. We receive our boarding passes and walk to gate 6. We see our plane and our luggage being loaded onto it. For some reason, the catwalk is being pulled away from the right side of plane and put to the left side of the plane and we are not on it. While we are sitting at the gate, a flight crew—not ours—arrives and starts asking questions amongst themselves. "Is this our plane?" "I don't know." It turns out that this crew is just hitching a ride back to Chicago to pick up another plane. While this is going on, another United Airlines plane pulls up to the gate to unload passengers. This was 30 minutes after our flight was supposed to take off. We assume that people from this flight are get-

ting on ours and that's why we are waiting. It turns out that not a single passenger is getting on our flight. We do eventually board our plane and take off, arriving at O'Hare one-and-a-half hours after our flight is supposed to land. We head to the baggage-claim area and pick up all of our bags—except one. The golf clubs are nowhere to be found. I proceed to carousel 1, where the odd-shaped luggage is supposed to be if your other luggage has arrived on carrousel 2, 3 or 4. The clubs are not there. So I ask the attendant on duty where they might be. He says they are on carousel 8, the one that is supposed to be used if your luggage has arrived on carrousel 5, 6 or 7. Signs posted everywhere clearly state this, so I know that I am not the idiot in this case. My suggestion to the tenant at carousel 8 was, "Maybe you should put these signs in back so your own employees know what the hell is going on." All I get for my constructive criticism is a shoulder shrug.

This story doesn't have a moral, but it has a purpose. Anytime you think you're having a bad day, give this story a once over; it's bound to make you feel better about yourself. As my dad would say, "If you didn't have bad luck, you wouldn't have any luck at all." I know that parts of this sound implausible, that some might think, "This didn't really happen." In fact, every part of this is true and did happen. And I am getting married April 23, 2005.



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