

An Ordinary Day in the Airport Lounge

The third time I circle the gate area, a young woman's smiling face motions that she is willing to make room for me on a low window ledge. She's the only one who has noticed my plight. I am relieved that I can get off my feet and take a breather before assessing the situation. "It is a madhouse," I remark to her and the others jammed in like a multitude of tiny birds perched on a telephone wire waiting to disperse into the sky.

Following rush hour I had taken a quick Uber ride from Manhattan via the Midtown Tunnel to LaGuardia Airport after spending a weekend with my grown daughter. I sat back reviewing our jam-packed time together while the driver weaved in and out of construction for the badly needed new terminals looming tall in the gloomy threatening sky. He had done it before many times and casually one-armed through the loops and narrow passageways right to the Delta terminal entrance. After a half hour in the TSA line that moved along steadily, I breezed through, collected my blue canvas carry on and headed to the gate area proud that I have mastered using the Delta app on my phone for my ticket. I break travel up into small increments, or steps, visualizing my final destination and staying with it in my mind. A frequent flyer gave me that advice a long time ago.

The young woman's red plaid rollup sleeve shirt and khaki pants are rumpled from what already appears to have been a long travel day, and now with more to come, thanks to the newly announced delay at the LaGuardia gate—groans of various length and volume erupt from a captive crowd. She will have to hold up a bit longer, if it matters to her. It's to be a short commuter hop for me home to Rochester, and I can wait it out.

Once I position my body with my legs awkwardly sprawled out, I glance up to see if someone might have gotten up in the last

fifteen seconds that it has taken me to descend to the ground. The regulars wisely are coveting plastic seats near USB ports and continuing on with their business for it's a Monday morning workday all over the world, and the lounge is an extension of the office. Others are standing and commandeering what limited space is available. They excel at the airport drill.

Since I am seated so close to the ground, I fixate on the young woman's choice of shoes—navy-running sneakers with neon orange laces. Once I wore sneakers naively thinking it would make the long walks from gate to gate easier, and beforehand, I went into total denial about having to take them on and off at the security TSA checkpoint. Trying to ease out of them hopping first on one foot and then the other without making a complete idiot of myself was a scene out of an oldie, but goodie, Tina Fey stand up routine, except that she would have had just the proper quip to go along with her fumbling.

Periodically, I look down at my carry on and purse tucked near my legs. It is a habit of mine to notice luggage and the young woman's is a sleek hard body shiny black carry-on with a custom Delta Airlines luggage tag. She's a Delta Queen then with lots of air miles. A goal of mine in traveling now that I am creeping up in age is being able to handle my luggage and get away with hands free as much as possible. I observe others in my age bracket that struggle and expect a kindly person to remove heavy awkward luggage from the above seating bins, and when my day comes, I will quit flying. My ledge companion has an air of independence about her, and I haven't lost mine either. I sit up a little straighter, and check my phone for messages.

You can expect that the longer we wait in the terminal, the more restless folks become, and the volume of chatter increases as a result echoing off the high ceilings. The young woman, on the other hand, slumps down further with both feet propped up on her suitcase, rolls down her sleeves and leans into her cell phone oblivious to what's around her. There is no way that I can last much longer in this pretzel position and I decide that I would

prefer to wander instead. Back and forth I hike to the ladies room for that one last visit just to make sure and to the kiosk for a bottle of water so I won't be at the whim of the flight attendant onboard. From the observation area I watch planes take off and land assuring me that the entire airport itself has not shut down due to bad weather. It is on my final stroll back down the carpeted hallway that I see the young woman seated in the same spot and it dawns on me that I would be her years ago. That's a good feeling. My flight is called and I have to catch my plane.