

The “Joys” of Jetlag

Since our marriage in October, 1952, Betty and I have made 12 major moves, not counting all the ministry travel, multiple ocean-crossing furloughs, and extended stays all over North and South America, East and West Europe. In my pre- and post-wedding lifetime, according to my trusty solar calculator, I have moved on the average of once every three years. (Sounds like career military duty.)

If the Lord had revealed this “moving” fact to me at the beginning of my earthly ministry, he may have scared me off. (By the time I got married, at age 24, I had lived in two hemispheres, resided in three countries – Ukraine, Canada, USA – and made at least 14 moves – with or without my parents).

In retrospect, I can say that although it wasn't easy, it was challenging, fulfilling and rewarding. If that sounds too lofty, then let's just say it was part of the job, moving in the will of God. Betty and I would do it all over again, if we had to. I must confess, however, that I have, on occasion, wondered why some Christians are called to stay in one place all their lives, while others are ministry migrants.

Betty and I recall one particular informal time with the students of the Russian Bible Institute in Buenos Aires, where I was teaching for one semester back in 1979, covering for the furloughing director. The students had picked up on not only our having had to fly from the States to Argentina, but also on our trips to, and stays in, Europe. Besides, they knew that on weekends I was away on meetings around Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay.

They thought it was a glamorous lifestyle. They, too, would like to live that way. "Become an international Christian worker and see the world," they were obviously thinking. Betty and I looked at each other and knew what we had to do; we shared with them what missionary travel and moving is really like.

There is absolutely nothing glamorous about it. We rarely had the time or money to take a trip for ourselves – like a holiday, a vacation. It was always traveling to and from meetings, to and from assignments. Moving.

Sleepless nights, driving coast to coast. Cross-country American buses and trains. (Tolerable.) Cross-country foreign buses and trains. (A different world. You have to ride it to believe it.) Transoceanic ship and air travel. Lost, stolen, destroyed luggage.

We told them all about the “joys” of jet lag. Compressed nights, expanded days. Departing and arriving at unearthly hours. Missing connections. Overnight waits and delays. Cancellations. Unscrupulous airline supervisors. Nasty border guards. Corrupt customs officials. Visa and passport complications.

Sickness on the high seas, sickness on terra firma, sickness in the bumpy air. Constipation. Diarrhea. Intestinal parasites.

Sleeping and eating in the homes of people in many countries, of many cultures, of questionable hygienic standards.

After one exceptionally exhausting stay in the States, back-to-back with meetings in England, I finally fell into my own bed in Monaco. When I woke up, I didn't know where I was or who I was! Fortunately, the phenomenon was momentary – at least I like to think so.

In a word, we gave them a comprehensive and realistic description of international travel and ministry. (We did not even touch the subject of working daily with less than perfect colleagues. That means all of us. No exceptions.)

"Now that you see more of a complete picture, do you still think our lives are glamorous?" we asked them. Without exception, they all shook their heads horizontally. (In Argentina, that also means "no.")

As the expression goes: we were not complaining; just explaining. We wouldn't change the logistics of our past ministry because, as the Gospel song says, "Jesus led [us] all the way." ◇◇◇