

TRAVELING WITH THE QUEEN.

By James Collins.

In 2006 my wife Eileen, her sister, Marie, my brother-in-law Owen and I all traveled to London to view England on a self-directed tour. We had a marvelous trip, met many interesting people and had a tremendous amount of fun and enjoyment. We were tired and looking forward to our trip back to America. We were in Heathrow and as requested, we showed up about two hours early so that we could process through security with a minimum of delay and problems. Security was intense and in England there were a large number of submachine guns and armored vests visible on all the security operatives who roamed the airport. My sister-in-law was a little anxious when she saw all the guns. She assumed they knew something was going to happen and did not want to be a participant. I assured her that this was just standard security in England, which was more intense than in the United States because the English were still encountering problems with the IRA.

After we processed our tickets at the desk and checked our luggage, we went over to have a cup of coffee and proceeded to our loading gate. The walk was long and luckily they had some moving sidewalks, which reduced the number of steps you had to take but we traveled in excess of a tenth of a mile to get to the security area. A number of gates fed in and out of this Security Center but nobody was present except for the security officers and the four of us. Everything was calm and peaceful. We were smiling and joking with the security people and all was well with the world. Then a door connected to an arriving aircraft opened at the far end of the area and a hoard of short, black Burqa clad, women muttering laughing and yelling in a foreign language filled the area, and rushed towards our security position.

A Klaxon blared as if a submarine just received an order to dive. Immediately all the security forces turn from nice, friendly people to militarized automatons. The Arab women in the Burqas, herded together like sheep, lined up in three lines each going to a security pair. Security personnel teams grabbed Owen, Marie and me. Owen had to empty his pockets and take off his size 12 shoes, while they ran a metal detector wand over his body front and back.

Two agents, one male and one female stopped Marie. The female security agent immediately started a frisking operation touching Marie in places she had never expected to be touched in an airport. This raised her anxiety and killed her self-esteem. The male agent ran the security wand over front and back and of course, there was no contraband or weapons found.

I received the attention of two large security agents who slammed me up against a big wall with my arms up and extended. They emptied my pockets and had me take off my shoes. I had undergone this kind of invasion previously in England when I arrived from Ireland on a plane on the day that the IRA decided to bomb a train station. The intense physical security check out was similar to that event.

Security, however, treated my wife, Eileen, like the Queen of England. They waved her through the security gate with a cursory look into her handbag and sent her on her way while they treated the three of us as if we had just escaped from an English prison. After Security finally

cleared us, it took another 10 minutes for us to get everything together, retrieve our shoes and restore our dignity.

For the past seven years, the four of us have travelled all over the country on vacation by airplane. We never again encountered anything like the English Security check that we experienced in Heathrow, the day the Arab contingent showed up. However, we do talk about it jokingly as, overtime, it has changed from a frightening event to an hilarious remembrance of when we travel with the Queen.

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