

Feasting on the unexpected

A missed flight, a cheap motel, and a mushy apple

by [Peter W. Marty](#) in the [September 14, 2016](#) issue



Thinkstock

I've only missed one flight in my life. My wife and I glanced at the itinerary wrong, mistaking our initial flight for the return flight home. Having committed the wrong departure time to memory, we relaxed into our final day of vacation, confident that an 8 p.m. return of the rental car was perfect.

When the ticket agent informed us that our flight had taken off 30 minutes before we arrived, Susan and I looked at each other in dismay. The next flight out was 5:30 a.m. Each of us landed a \$100 rebooking fee. Frustrated with no one but ourselves, we started calling around for a cheap motel with an airport shuttle.

The motel stood alone in a vast industrial park. With no restaurants in sight except a McDonald's in the distance, we set off walking toward the golden arches. Only the drive-thru was open at 10 p.m., so we did what any soul with an empty stomach and a little cash would do. We stood in line. The guy in the pickup truck ahead of us kept monitoring his mirrors as if we might be a late-night freak show. We inhaled his exhaust and exhaled our humiliation.

When the time came to place our order through the little metal box, nothing happened. No one answered. Figuring there must be a motion sensor, we started

dancing. I shadowboxed the dark. Surely the people waiting inside the next two cars in line understood we were a perfectly normal couple in our fifties. Still getting no response from the cashier, I suggested we start jumping. Perhaps there was a weight sensor that needed triggering. Leaping and hopping brought us no closer to a human voice. Finally, we walked up to the window and knocked.

“You must be in a car,” the woman mouthed to us through the glass. “What!?” I shouted back, throwing up my arms. “You must be in a car,” she repeated. It was clear she wasn’t going to open the @\$% window. I stepped back and studied the next car in line. A sports car. No backseat. There was no way I was going to ask this couple to order food for us, even if I am an extrovert. No way. We put our heads down and walked back to the motel.

Digging for our toothbrushes before bedtime, Susan came upon a forgotten apple—a mushy one—buried near the dirty laundry. There on the edge of the bed we took turns biting into it. The pitiful sag of the mattress pitched us together like lovers. Neither of us said much, aware that we were enjoying the fruit of our foolish exploits. I do remember that apple tasting like a gift from heaven.

I wonder what Adam and Eve said to each other after their foolishness. Who knows if they grabbed an apple or a pear that day in the garden? Whatever it was, they shared it . . . like lovers on the edge of a bed in a cheap motel.

Readers may be surprised to discover that none of [the “Feast” essays in this issue](#) mentions mountains of food. Instead, all of the writers describe a feast as a meal shared between people, sometimes in the most unremarkable of places.

A version of this article appears in the September 14 print edition under the title “A feast in a cheap motel.”