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Business Day

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Jules Pieri, chief of Daily Grommet, hiking in County Wicklow, Ireland. Her business trips have not always gone smoothly.

An Unexpected Memento Walking at O'Hare, And Other Misadventures

I REMEMBER my first business trip.

I was working in Detroit as an industrial designer, and I had to go to California. I was excited, but naïve. I left my return ticket in the seat back. I was making only \$13,000 a year, and it was tough waiting for reimbursement. I even screwed up my first appointment, when I went down to the hotel lobby at 4 a.m. to meet a colleague. The meeting was set for 7 a.m. I forgot about the time change.

Now, business travel is something I don't think twice about. As part of my job, I travel all over the United States to find items to feature on our site. This is my third start-up, and I've been traveling for many years. But I'm still not one of those business travelers for whom everything goes right.

I always fly with products, and I know the rules. But when I was headed back to Detroit recently, I wanted to bring something for my mom. We always have samples in the office, and from among the hundreds of things I could have picked, I chose this five-inch-long, really sharp ceramic knife. That raises the question, "What was I thinking?" The knife never made it through security, so no gift for Mom. But she

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was happy that I wasn't detained. So was I.

I seem to have an issue with gifts.

During last year's Stanley Cup, I had a meeting in Chicago with an important executive. While I was in Logan, I bought a Boston Bruins shot glass to give to him. It was supposed to represent Boston and since the Bruins were playing in the Stanley Cup, I thought it was kind of fun.

I arrived at the meeting and gave the guy the gift. He took a look at it and then asked me who the Bruins were. I thought he was joking. I told him the Bruins were a hockey team who were playing in the Stanley Cup. Then he asked me what the Stanley Cup was.

Executives prefer that you know everything about them before a meeting, and I didn't know

By Jules Pieri, as told to Joan Raymond. E-mail: joan.raymond@nytimes.com

Q. How often do you fly for business?

A. Two to four times a month, mostly domestic.

Q. What's your least favorite airport?

A. I really hate La Guardia, but not for the reasons you think. I got ill there and couldn't get home quickly because of the weather. It was, and still is, a terrible memory.

Q. Of all the places you've been, what's the best?

A. Barcelona. I started my career as an industrial designer, and I look at the world through those eyes. The architecture, products, even the food is a little off-center and interesting to me.

Q. What's your secret airport vice?

A. I tried to develop a vice in the last year by getting a pedicure during layovers. It was miserable. So I'm still trying to find a vice.

this guy wasn't a sports fan. The meeting was a major fail, and I bet the guy threw out the gift as soon as I left his office.

I can't even win with wildlife.

I went to Chicago for yet another meeting, and I saw some birds flying around inside O'Hare. I didn't think much of it, but I swear people were looking at me funny as I was making my way out of the airport.

Right before I went into my meeting, I stopped in a restroom and realized one of those birds, or maybe a flock, had left a huge deposit on my blouse, my hair and my neck. It looked like they were all eating Cinnabon crumbs.

I have no clue how I didn't feel the splash. I washed my face, tried to fix my hair, but nothing could be done about the blouse. I was actually making matters worse, and the streak couldn't be covered by a jacket.

I put on my game face and walked into the guy's office. The bird remnant was really conspicuous, but he never mentioned it. Neither did I.

I wish I could say the meeting went well. It didn't. I looked very sad with my disheveled hair and stained blouse. There was no way he was going to make an investment. I'm not sure I would have either.

When I went back to O'Hare, I heard the birds chirping. I'm pretty sure they were laughing at me.