

Santa Barbara, California

THE GREYHOUND

September 13, 2001

2 days after the Bombing of the
World Trade Center, New York City, USA

It was 4:15 a.m. in the morning as I started to wrestle my huge, single piece of luggage down my cottage steps. I was somewhat exercised at my own carelessness! My eagle cane was still leaning up against the front door! I had put it there so I wouldn't forget it. The taxi was five minutes away and that cane was supposed to be in my packed bag ready to rush to the Greyhound Bus station for its 4:25 a.m. departure. It was the only 'express run' that day from Santa Barbara, California to Huntsville, Alabama. All airports were closed across the country, two days after the horrific bombing of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001

That one bag had been a beast to get closed the night before. The industrial strength zippers had fought me, but I had gotten it closed. No way was I undoing that monster. There was nothing for it but to unscrew the beautiful carved Eagle top from the lower half of the staff. I wrapped the Eagle in a pair of wool hiking socks and hoped its sharp beak would make the trip. Then I fit the two pieces into my roll-on computer case. Each half of the cane stuck out about eight inches. I hoped that the Greyhound Bus would permit me to carry-on the computer case and my cane. The airlines were instituting rigorous new search and security procedures. No razors, no knives, nothing sharp. That eagle head was weighted and the carved beak sharp. It was never meant to be a weapon but it could have done considerable damage in the wrong hands.

However, it was my symbol of authority as president of the National Institute for Urban Search and Rescue. I was determined to carry it with me. I had a 60-hour bus ride to my Joint Board Meeting in Alabama, scheduled 3 months before the tragic events of Sept. 11, the hijacking of the commercial aircraft and the bombing of the World Trade Centers, and the Pentagon.

As a woman of 81 years, I travel everywhere alone and enjoy the adventures that occur. This night it was 4:15 a.m. and what we used to call "0-dark-hundred". The taxi had just dropped me at the closed Greyhound bus station and driven off. I'm not used to being uncomfortable in strange situations. However, there was one bare bulb casting ominous shadows in the loading area. Even in an upscale tourist town such as Santa Barbara, it was eerie.

The bushes gave a rustle and a shadowy figure of a man appeared. My heart did give an extra bump. I remembered the advice to avoid eye contact. When I did look up he had disappeared. Then a taxi pulled into the taxi stand on

the dark street. Ah, at least one other person was awake in the entire village! Then one more cab pulled up. I started to notice things around me. I was about to enroll in class Greyhound 101. A new culture, and at least for me, what turned out to be a fascinating adventure.

It seems impossible at my age, but I don't believe I had ever ridden a Greyhound before. In the wake of the terrorist bombing of the World Trade Centers, the airports were shut down. Within five days, I was scheduled, as president of the National Association for Urban Search & Rescue, to open a large Counter-terrorism Conference in Huntsville, Alabama. Driving across country would have been pushing it to make it in five days. It would have meant long hours of steady driving and little sleep. I had opted for 60 hours on the Greyhound. I was routed straight through with no layovers.

Another reason for my not chancing an airplane flight to the east had been the lengths of polished wood that were poking out of the zippers of my computer bag' They were the ends of the carved and weighted head of my staff. Years before, I had admired Margaret Mead's spirit and *élan* as she grew older. She continued her work at the Smithsonian Institute, marching up and down their long museum corridors using a six-foot staff instead of a cane. Her staff was a Samoan war club that a native chief had given her during her studies in Samoa. No one had ever given me a war club, so I bought a 5-foot Eagle headed staff! It made an impressive symbol of my office, but, in hindsight, could be considered a dangerous weapon. I hazarded that I could get it to Huntsville and my Counter-Terrorism Conference via Greyhound where I expected lesser security measures than at the airports.

Folks began to arrive for the 4:25 bus. A pretty girl and her boyfriend drove up in a pick-up, but drove back out to a darker corner of the parking lot for a few more good-bye kisses perhaps? Then that first man that had given me a start, re-appeared. He had been sitting on the other side of the Coco-Cola machine, four feet from me the entire time. Was he as apprehensive about me, as I had been of him? I suppose I did look like a bag lady with my polyester, no wrinkle green pants suit and bandana. However, I was dressed for comfort on a 60-hour bus trip.

There was a large empty Greyhound bus in one of the loading docks. I had expected a driver to appear, but no Greyhound uniform had shown. With a roar and a belch of diesel, our bus flew out of the darkness into our black area, headlights blazing. I had a lot more to learn in Greyhound 101. So far, my few guesses had been off the mark.

The driver jumped down and even at that early hour, eight or nine folks got off the bus. What could they be doing arriving in a tourist town at that hour? I never did find an answer to that. The bus driver was all hasty business, selling

tickets to passengers and loading baggage, including my one monster bag. Everything fit into the maw of the underside of the bus

Then he shouted, "Everybody in!" and hopped ahead of us into his seat. With a roar he turned over the engine. That gave a push to the folks as they scrambled up the steep steps into the huge bus. I was not climbing those steps fast enough for our driver. The two polished lengths of wood poking through the zipper closing on my rolling computer bag made it unwieldy. A nice young man behind me helped me as the driver gunned his motor. We wedged it into the overhead luggage space, which closed with bungee cords. These cords are in place of the doors on the overhead luggage space in airplanes. They are so tight and strong that they nearly keep you from getting your luggage past them to begin with!

The young man asked about the wood sticks that we had been wrestling with. He said, "Are you traveling with your own pool cue?" And I said, "Yes." which was a lie. Without realizing it, the young man had rescued me from my dilemma.

I was trying to carry what could have been considered a dangerous weapon. After the take-over of the four airplanes by terrorists using knives and box cutters, there was strict security everywhere. I had not wanted to run the risk of my treasured Eagle staff being confiscated. However, a pool cue seemed innocent enough.

All loaded, we passengers settled down in the dark for the 70-mile an hour ride to Los Angeles, our first stop. The driver turned off the interior lights and most folks settled down to sleep. Continuing my studies in Greyhound 101, I surveyed those few passengers that I could see in front of me.

First, the seats were large and very comfortable. They reclined and had footrests. They were much like business class seats on an airplane and they had lots of legroom. I realized that many people who ride the Greyhound are large people! Tall and big men. Short and very wide ladies! Perhaps it was because we were routed through the southern states to Alabama: through Arizona, New Mexico and Texas, then up to Tennessee and across to Huntsville. People grow large in the Southwest! The seats in the Greyhound fitted them comfort.

Next I realized that many of the folks carried large pillows and even blankets, or at least sheets, to wrap warmly around themselves. These were a logistic problem that I would not bother with if I ever take another long bus ride. The sheets, pillows and blankets wound up on the floor, or on someone else's seat. I was wearing my Marine Corps jacket liner under my green polyester. It kept me warm and toasty. It is 36 years old but as useful as when brand new. That's a jacket liner!

I too closed my eyes and when the bus stopped with a jolt, we were in Los Angeles surrounded by snorting, roaring Greyhound buses. The loud speakers were shouting out names of places and numbers of loading doorways. All useful instructions were lost in the din of the loading area. We had been told (warned) that we had to move our own baggage whenever we changed equipment (as in Los Angeles.) This was so that we would be sure that the luggage made the transfer with us.

Har-de-har-har! Between trying to find my monster luggage, get a breakfast burrito and a coffee, and find a ladies room, I never could find my baggage. And then find the right loading door. And the right part of my ticket. The scene reminded me with its hundreds of travelers, of the scenes of war evacuations. Everybody trying to get out of town on the next transportation.

However we all made it back aboard. The bus left with its mighty roar and we were off. I never did see my monster bag again at any transfer point. I just didn't worry about it. I was carrying my staff and my computer and I could manage with those essentials. I also realized that I was doomed for a diet of potato chips and Sprite for the rest of the trip. Although once out of Arizona, it was Mountain Dew. In California I never saw anyone drink Mountain Dew. But by the time you hit Texas even Coca Cola takes a back seat to that strange drink.

I realized that experienced travelers on Greyhound were carrying their own food with them. Some even had coolers in the overhead storage area. The usual stops, as we ventured farther and farther into the rural parts of the United States, were at McDonald's. I noticed that the driver's always fast-footed it down a block or two to a "Pop-Eyes Chicken". I think this must be a southwest version of a Kentucky Fried Chicken. I never did get to eat in one, At 81, I wasn't fast enough afoot to make it down and back before the driver was in his seat and we were off again! Man, those buses haul!

By now, we had become a family. This bunch of strangers, riding this speeding, roaring vehicle, had become a family. There was a tiny 24 year old black girl who had a daughter back east somewhere. She was the most helpful soul. She would rock the babies for the mother's traveling with several small children. She was a helper to all that needed help. An astonishing person. There were the younger men who would help me up and down the steep steps of the bus at our empty wayside 10-minute stops. I had become a 'famous person' to everyone on the bus as 'the older woman who was traveling with her own 'pool cue'. News traveled through the bus like gossip over the back fence in the days of small towns. Each new person boarding the bus at various post offices and other rural wayside stops was brought up to speed on who was traveling on the bus. It was sort of like a 'welcome wagon' adding one more to the 'family' of travelers.

As it got dark after that first full day of traveling, with the lights off and while trying to settle down to sleep, I listened to the scraps of conversation around me. What an amazing experience. I was listening in two languages, English and Spanish. Some folks spoke both, some one or the other. In the wake of the terrorist bombing, much of the conversation was about the sadness and sympathy for the families of those dead and missing. Much in both languages was approval for President Bush. I had read a headline in a newspaper at one of our stops. It read, "Fear is Everywhere". Geez! I don't know where reporters pick up their information. There was no fear on that bus. People were angry. People were saddened. People were happy to see such unity appear in their fellow Americans.

There was talk about the stock market, about mortgages, about being careful of lawyers. There were lots of topics, all folks with firm ideas and reasons for their opinions. Not all those opinions agreed with mine, but they were cogent and had been thought through. I suppose I should be embarrassed to admit that I had thought my fellow passengers would be uneducated or uninformed. Wrong!

It was an amazing mix of people. One of my seatmates was a former policeman who had been put on medical leave with a knee injury. Another was a PHD from the University of Peru who was traveling to the University of North Carolina as an exchange student in Organic Agriculture. He spoke English but the fine points of loading doors and time schedules were beyond him. My Tex-Mex Spanish helped him find his way around the larger stops where we changed equipment.

Our bus entered west Texas. My Lord, there is a lot of West Texas! In spite of all the traveling that I have done, I had never crossed that area of the United States. In fact, the most of Texas that I had seen, other than the Dallas-Fort Worth airport, had been a little bit near the Oklahoma panhandle. I had thought the prairies of Wyoming were flat! Not compared to West Texas. It goes on for about 10 hours of Greyhound time. It is as flat as a dry pancake. A little tumbleweed and a few stunted sagebrush. Nothing. You couldn't ever feed cattle on that stuff. There are no towns, no water, and no people. Not even any fair sized rocks!

After many hours we arrived in Dallas for an equipment change—at 3:10 a.m. in the morning. That is no hour to be rousted off a bus, sent to find your luggage and then find the correct loading door for the next segment of the trip. I was having trouble because so many buses were loading and all going to places that I had no idea whether they led to Huntsville. Alabama or not. They were leaving Dallas for Chicago. No, that wasn't the one. Dallas to New York City, perhaps? Dallas to Miami? Yikes, which one? I realized that my knowledge of the South needed some further study! I settled on Dallas to Memphis when

they announced that the bus I needed was delayed. They were adding another bus to handle all the passengers. One went through Memphis, the other through Nashville. Some kind person steered me to what turned out to be the correct bus. Otherwise I might still be stuck in Dallas. (By this time I had given up on ever finding .my monster luggage.)

Until this point we had had a great trip. The bus drivers were helpful, the passengers fascinating and kind. The children stayed in their seats and were quiet. The buses and roads were comfortable and speedy.

Our new bus driver was none of the above. What a gruff, surly red-necked character. He yelled at us, he yelled at the baggage handler, he yelled at the driver he was replacing. At 4 a.m. he put everyone's teeth on edge and we were sulky as we climbed onto the bus for the next leg. I decided not to get out at the first brief stop but to keep on snoozing. At the following stop I figured I best find a candy bar at least. I was struggling down the steep steps with the help of one of the kind young men that had taken turns helping me.

Mr. Ugly, our bus driver, yelled at me "Hurry up. You're blocking the stairs. Everyone is held up behind you." This was true, but I was doing the best I could. He had made a mistake in yelling at me. At that hour, after that many hours, (days?) on the bus, I felt an almost uncontrollable rage. My impulse was to take two more steps into the air and fall on him as he stood below me at the foot of the stairs. I would have squashed him like a bug! Somehow, sanity prevailed. I was in no position to wind up in jail on an assault charge in Dallas. I had a counter-terrorism convention to run.

I sat down on the steps and said, "Don't yell at me. You are damn lucky I can move at all." He said, "Get up. Get down these steps or I will get my tractor and move you." By this time the nice young man had faded into the background. He wanted no part of this.

I answered the bully, "Good, you go get your tractor, and I will sit here and wait for you."

But he backed down. He said, "I was just joshing you." (Sure!) And he put out his hand and helped me down. Even red-necked, probable wife-abuser bullies, should be careful whom they annoy at 4 in the morning! It turned out to be a wasted effort to have left my comfortable seat. There was a Mountain Dew machine and that was it! So back on the bus and off to the sunrise.

When daylight came the scenery had improved. Sometime in the night we had passed a young couple at a supposed bus stop. I was asleep and didn't notice but the grapevine told me as soon as I woke up. At the next 10 minute scheduled stop, the young couple had caught a lift with an 18-wheeler and arrived ahead of us into Memphis. They had complained to the Greyhound

management at the depot about being passed up. In any event they replaced that miserable driver and everyone in our 'bus family' was pleased and relieved.

The scenery started to improve. By the time the sun began to rise we were in Tennessee. That state has some of the most beautiful woods and forests in the United States. Although I had been many places in Tennessee, including some interesting ones, arriving by National Guard helicopter in a storm, this was the first time I had driven through that part of the state. Another time I had spent three days in West Tennessee where it rained and sleeted the entire time. When it rains in Tennessee it rains sidewise from the wind!

However, this was the most gorgeous sunrise. We were heading east and the pink sky was beautiful. We had been traveling along a two-lane road, with no traffic. In the west we would call it a high mesa. I don't know what they call it in Tennessee, but we started to drop down into the misty valleys below. We dropped down, bench after bench. In all, we must have dropped about two to three thousand feet from the top of the mountain range that we had been traveling in the dark.

It was the one pass down in those surrounding mountains. I wondered if it was the Cumberland Gap, but of course not. That's in Virginia. However, you could see that the early settlers who had ridden west from the original pioneer settlements in the east had few ways to access the country to the west. I must find out what the name of that gap is. Perhaps it's the way Daniel Boone headed into the unsettled back lands?

We began to hit the first traffic that we had seen since Arizona. There even was no traffic in Dallas as it was 3:30 a.m. when we had arrived there. It was here in Nashville that we picked up our first unruly passenger. After we had left for the next stop, on almost the final leg of my trip, some new guy in the back began hassling one of the younger women in the rear of the bus. The policeman traveling next to me turned around and was ready to go back there, when someone closer settled him down. I again thought of that headline, "Fear is Everywhere." Not on that Greyhound bus, it's not!

Our 'Greyhound family' was united. We took care of ourselves and were responsible for the welfare of the group. Whether it was help for a traveling child, or one of the many disabled passengers, or to quell an unruly ignoramus, we took a stand. It was beautiful to see.

When we got to Huntsville, Alabama, my monster bag was under the bus in its giant caverns. How did that happen after so many days and so many miles? I was sad to see my friends and the bus disappear in another cloud of diesel fumes.

The next week, near Louisville, Kentucky, a Croatian man, carrying an expired visitors permit to this country, slit a Greyhound bus driver's throat. Nine people were killed in the succeeding crash. The attacker was killed. The driver survived although with a serious injury. I wonder if someone on that bus, had they taken a stand for the lady that had refused to give up her first row seat, might have averted that tragedy?

I will close this tale of my Greyhound travels following the tragedies of September 11, 2001 by quoting a message sent to me from a professional friend regarding her return flight to Washington D.C. that same week.

She wrote, "I just wanted to drop you a note and let you know that I arrived safe and sound into Dulles tonight (Sept. 15th) at about 6:00. It was an interesting flight.

"The airport in Denver was almost spooky; it was so empty and quiet. No one was in line for the security check point when I got there so that went fairly quickly, just x-ray of my bags and then a chemical test to be sure nothing explosive was on them.

"Then I waited 2 ½ hours to board the plane. What happened after we boarded was interesting and I thought I would share it with you.

"The pilot/captain came on the loudspeaker after the doors were closed. His speech went like this--:

"First I want to thank you for being brave enough to fly today. The doors are now closed and we have no help from the outside for any problems that might occur inside this plane. As you could tell when you checked in, the government has made some changes to increase security in the airports.

"They have not, however, made any rules about what happens after those doors close. Until they do that, we have made our own rules and I want to share them with you. Once those doors close, we only have each other.

"The security has taken care of a threat like guns with all of the increased scanning, etc. Then we have the supposed bomb. If you have a bomb, there is no need to tell me about it, or anyone else on this plane, you are already in control. So for this flight there are no bombs that exist on this plane.

"Now, the threats that are left are things like plastics, wood, knives, and other weapons that can be made or things like that which can be used as weapons.

"Here is our plan and your rules. If someone or several people stand up and say they are hijacking this plane, I want you all to stand up together.

"Then take whatever you have available to you and throw it at them. Throw it at their faces and heads so they will have to raise their hands to protect themselves.

“The very best protections you have against knives are the pillows and blankets. Whoever is close to these people should then try to get a blanket over their head-then they won’t be able to see. Once that is done, get them down and keep them down. Do not let them up. I will then land the plane at the closest place and we WILL take care of them.

“After all, there are usually only a few of them and we are 200+ strong.
“We will not allow them to take over this plane”

“I find it interesting that the US Constitution begins with the words: “We, the people—“ That’s who we are, THE people and we will not be defeated.”

“With that, the passengers on the plane all began to applaud, people had tears in their eyes, and we began the trip toward the runway.

“The flight attendant then started her safety speech. One of the things she said is that we are all so busy and live our lives at such a fast pace. She asked that everyone turn to their neighbors on either side and introduce themselves, tell each other something about your families and children, show pictures, whatever. She said, “For today, we consider you family. We will treat you as such and ask that you do the same with us.”

“Throughout the flight we learned that for the crew, this was their first flight since Tuesday’s (Sept. 11th) tragedies. It was a day that everyone leaned on each other, and together everyone was stronger than any one person alone.

“It was quite an experience. You can imagine the feeling when that plane touched down at Dulles and we heard ‘Welcome to Washington Dulles Airport, where the local time is 6:40’. Again, the cabin was filled with applause.”

What makes us so different as Americans? What is it that makes us so different as a country? Is it that we are free? We are free to stand against bullying on a bus. We are free to unite against a terrorist on a plane. We are free to possibly do him (or her) some grave injury. We are not only 200+ on a plane. We are 280+ million strong.

God Bless America.