

See No Evil . . .

It's bad enough that our flight from London to New York has had to be diverted, but. . . Bangor, Maine? Really?

Somewhere over the Atlantic ocean, a couple of hours after we had left Heathrow for New York, some idiot jumped up and started yelling about having a bomb, and then running up to the cockpit door and pounding on it. "I must fly this plane," he kept shouting.

Fortunately, it took about ten seconds for three or four guys up there in first class to have this guy eating carpet, face down on the floor with a knee on his neck and both arms hammer-locked behind him. One of the guys happened to be an air-marshal, so the nut case was handcuffed and then bum-rushed to the back of the plane. The whole thing took maybe two minutes.

But now our pilot has told us that protocol requires that we divert to Bangor because it is the closest airport in the USA to Europe. It also has, he said, an unusually long runway that can accommodate all sizes of aircraft. Little old Bangor, therefore, has become the de facto dumping ground for any commercial flights from the east which have experienced some kind of mechanical or on-board "incident"

So we have landed, parked and are sitting, mostly in silence, in our Boeing 765, which seems nearly as big as the airport terminal itself. We have no idea as to what we're supposed to do now, but it would seem logical that once the crazy guy has been removed from the plane, we will simply continue on to New York. But logic doesn't always prevail. An official sounding voice comes on the intercom and tells us that since they have no idea whether this guy was acting alone or is actually part of a bigger threat, we will have to remain on the plane while each of the passengers-all 253 of us- is carefully screened.

Long-story-short: Once each of us has been checked, which takes more than three hours, the delay is over. So I figure, okay, now off we go to New York. Wrong again. It seems that the pilots and crew have been on duty longer than the federally allowable time and that it will be the following morning before a new crew can be found to finish our flight. Well, not so bad, I reason. I'll just catch another regularly scheduled plane to New York and be there before midnight. To my surprise, however, when I check on my cell phone, I find that the Bangor Airport not only has no more flights out to New York that evening, but, in fact, has no more flights out that evening to anywhere.

There's not a seat to be found in the absurdly small waiting area, so now I'm standing here wondering what kind of parallel universe I have been dropped into. As I'm doing this, I

notice a sign saying, “Need Accommodations?” being held by a middle-aged woman. I walk toward her, and it turns out that the sign-carrier is a kind of triage person, matching up needy travelers with someone from the group near her. When I am able to get her attention, I ask about finding someplace to stay that night. She smiles, looks at a list on her clipboard and calls out “Beth Crawford!” I turn to see a rather plain-looking woman emerge from the crowd. She’s of average height and build, probably middle forties and dressed in what I imagine is winter-in-Bangor-traditional: Jeans, warm-looking boots, and a heavy, hooded, black parka. “Welcome to Bangor.” She smiles, grey-blue eyes sparkling, and offers a hand. “I’m Beth Crawford, and I’d like to invite you to stay with us tonight.”

A bit taken aback by this unexpected offer, I mumble, “Well, thanks . . . I don’t know . . . I mean, like at your house?”

“Of course, at our house. With my husband and two children and me.” Seeing my hesitation, she goes on. “This happens so often . . .” and she gestures in the direction of the planes. “So we’ve formed a Bangor Hospitality Group. We offer food and drink and sometimes even lodging to people when they are stranded here. Whenever we hear about something like what happened to you today, we mobilize our membership and head for the airport.” She shrugs and smiles “So . . . here I am.”

I “Well . . . sure,” I say as I offer my hand. “My name’s Arthur Bowen . . . and I thank you so much. You’re really a life-saver.”

Pulling my small carry-on suitcase behind me, I follow Beth out to the open-air parking area. She heads for an older, maroon SUV with a man sitting behind the wheel, and as we approach, the van door opens, and he climbs out. He’s a big guy, maybe six-two and over two hundred pounds I’m sure. His dark, military cropped hair has receded somewhat and shows a few sprinkles of grey. His deep-set, squinty eyes lie under unusually bushy eyebrows and a three day growth of beard completes the “Downeast” stereotype. He goes straight for my suitcase. “Here’ya go . . . let me take that,” he says, so I let go of the pull handle and watch as he opens the back door and tosses my bag unceremoniously onto the seat.

“This is my husband, Floyd,” Beth offers, and he and I shake hands before I climb into the back seat with my suitcase while the two of them take their places in front. Beth and I trade a few pleasantries about the troubles on the plane and the governmental bureaucracy that makes it impossible for me to get to New York that night, and then we travel on in silence. It’s not hard to tell, however, that Beth Crawford is far more excited about this idea of accepting a stranger into her home than is her husband.

It's only a few minutes before we turn into one end of a horseshoe-shaped, frost-heaved, asphalt driveway. Floyd pulls to a stop next to the front door of a modest ranch-style home, and we all pile out, me dragging my suitcase behind me. Just as we get to the door, it opens, and framed in the doorway are two kids, one boy and one girl. Once we've all made our way inside, Beth takes care of the introductions. "This is our daughter, Hannah, she's twelve . . . and this is Floyd junior, but we call him by his middle name, Barkley. He's fourteen." There is a momentary silence, and then she continues. "And, children, this is Mr. Bowen"

To my surprise, the father calls out "Manners!", and as if on cue, here comes Hannah toward me. Someday she is going to be a pretty woman, but for now her thin frame, pale complexion and straight, just-below-the ears brown hair make her much plainer than she needs to be. For the most part, her eyes have been downcast, but as she moves towards me, she looks up, and her emerald eyes move rapidly back and forth, making her look both fearful and vulnerable. She sticks out her hand but only offers her fingertips. I take them, but she doesn't squeeze. Instead she bows her head slightly and offers up a dainty, but perfectly executed curtsey. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Bowen," she says in a whispery voice, and pulls back her hand and slips back to her place next to her brother.

Next is Barkley, who approaches me and offers his full hand. I take it, and as he squeezes it firmly, he, too, bows his head and literally clicks his heels together. “Pleased to meet you, Mr. Bowen,” he repeats in a quiet monotone. Then he looks up, withdraws his hand, and silently rejoins his sister. Both Barkley and his sister are dressed in what I assume is some form of school uniform: khaki skirt/pants, white dress shirt, blue blazer with an indistinguishable crest on its pocket and clean, white Nike-type sneakers.

There is another uncomfortable moment of silence until Mrs. Crawford claps her hands twice and says, “Well, Arthur, I imagine you’re starving after such a long day. So let me see what I can do about some dinner for us.” As if released from a time-out, the two children disappear almost unnoticed, while Floyd goes to a wet bar at the far end of the living room and begins making a drink. “Would you care for something to drink?” Mrs. Crawford asks in the absence of any offer from her husband.

“No thanks. I’m all set. But I appreciate the offer.”

“Well, let me get going with dinner. It’ll just be a few minutes.” Mrs. Crawford hurries out of the room as Floyd Crawford finds his way to a leather-covered lounge chair with a drink-holder conveniently located in one of the arm rests. Settling himself, he picks up the TV remote and brings up the local news station; I sit down on a worn, straight-back arm chair

separated from Floyd's by a round, well-polished end table. I sit stoically, watching the news, some of which is actually of interest to me since there is much ado about our diverted plane. I make a couple of brief comments, but Floyd is unresponsive, so I retreat, once again, into silence. The large living room we're in is just to the left of the entrance hall with a dining room that leads into a kitchen to the right. At the far end of the entrance area is an arched opening with what appears to be a parallel hallway beyond it which, I presume, is the way to the bedroom areas. The singular impression I get is that there is a drab, worn feeling to what could be, with a little work, a rather nice, much more attractive home.

True to her word, after about twenty minutes, Beth calls out that dinner is ready. I stand up and head for the dining room, and when I get there, am surprised to find Hannah and Barkley standing motionless behind their chairs across from each other on the side of the table. Beth directs me to a chair at the side of the table next to Barkley, and I dutifully take up my spot behind it.

After an another awkward period of silence while we all stand just so, Floyd Crawford marches into the room, stops briefly behind his chair, and then barks, "Be seated!" We all do as instructed and there follows a flurry of napkin-in-the-lap activity, and then another silence. Floyd looks around the table, seemingly intent on making sure everything is in its proper

place and that his wife and children are turned out to his approval. Then, with an unexpected friendliness in his voice, he says heartily, “Well, how about some chow here? Looks great, Beth.” All the food is arranged on platters in front of Floyd with five plates stacked nearby. It is his role to fill each plate and then pass it by name to one of us: “This is for our guest, Mr. Bowen.” “This is for mother. . . .”

Conversation at dinner is, at first, led by Beth in what seems to be an often-used script. Questions are directed equally toward the two children at first, eliciting short, polite answers from them, and then a question or two for Floyd. This seems to be the signal for him to take over the conversational lead, which he does with the passion of an evangelical preacher. His attitudes and opinions are conservative in the extreme, and he has the annoying habit of ending his rants by asking me, “Now isn’t that right, Mr. Bowen.” In my mind most of it is extremist garbage, but I’m not willing to engage in what would be hopeless attempts at changing his mind.

When Beth goes to the kitchen to make coffee, the children, as if on cue again, ask, “May I please be excused, sir?” When permission is granted by a slight nod of Floyd’s head, they fold their napkins carefully, stand up, collect their dishes and take them into the kitchen. Then Barkley and Hannah again disappear quietly. Again, everything seems so strangely scripted.

We take our coffee into the living room in relative silence since Floyd has, once again, turned on the TV and. Beth makes no attempt at conversation until after the second half-hour show is over. She stands, goes about the room collecting coffee cups and utensils and announces, "Well, it's off to bed for me. Mr. Bowen, the couch over there folds out into a nice bed . . . and it's all made up. So you enjoy the rest of your evening."

I watch TV with Floyd for another half-an-hour or so, and then, as noisily as possible, I wrestle open the bed, sit on it, and begin removing my shoes and socks. "Think I'll turn in," I say with a sigh. "It's been one hell of a day." When that produces another non-response from Floyd, I walk in my bare feet over to his chair and say, "Hey, Floyd. Can you tell me where the bathroom is?"

"Sure. Sure." He says without looking up. "Go through the arch at the end of the foyer, turn right down the hall and it's the door at the end." No acknowledgement of my go-to-bed intentions, so I head down the hallway toward the bathroom, noticing on the way Hannah in her open-door room on the right, and Barkley in the one just across the hall. Both seem busily engaged with homework, so I say nothing to them and walk on toward the bathroom. I wash up a bit, brush my teeth, and then head back to the living room. I'm dismayed to find that Floyd is still engrossed in whatever is on TV, but I soldier on, stripping down to my boxers and T-shirt and then lying noisily down onto

the bed. To my surprise, Floyd calls out, "Sleep well, Mr. Bowen."

"Um...about how long do you think you'll..." I begin.

"Good to have you here," Floyd monotones, and I realize now that I am yet another victim of TV-Gape. Defeated, I climb into the bed, try to find a spot where I'm not lying on something metal, and cover my ears with the two pillows. Exhausted, I fall asleep almost immediately.

Next thing I know, something wakes me up. The lights are all off, and when I look at my watch, it says that it's a little after two o'clock in the morning. I don't know what it was that woke me up, so, I start to settle back down. But then I hear something that makes me stop moving and listen more carefully. From down the part of the hallway that ends at the bathroom, I'm sure I hear someone crying. I'm wondering if something's wrong with one of the kids, so I get out of bed and walk to that archway that leads from the foyer to the interior hallway. It's quiet now, and I wait a little while before deciding that nothing's wrong. But just as I turn to head back to my bed, I hear distinctly a tiny voice of desperation calling out, "No, Daddy. No!" then some muffled crying followed by, "Please, Daddy . . . please don't!" And then there is a period of silence as I stand there knowing full well what's going on, yet frozen in place with uncertainty as to what I should do.

Before I can figure something out, however, the door to the room where the noise was coming from opens, and I can hear more clearly now Hannah's quiet sobbing. Of more concern, however, is that Floyd Crawford emerges quickly from the room and, I think, spots me before I can fully duck back into the foyer. I do turn and hustle back to my bed, and when he comes around the corner into the room, I'm busy faking like I had just awakened. Floyd walks over to my bed, turns on the light next to it and says "Sorry about the disturbance." He's wearing sweat pants and a ribbed undershirt, and his face is flushed and angry looking.

"What's wrong?" I lie. "Everything okay?"

"Kids . . ." he says. "Hannah has these nightmares every now and then and it takes me or Beth to go down there to calm her down. No big deal. Sorry to wake you up." He bends down and reaches for the light, but pauses and stares at me for what seems to be a long time before he turns it off and begins making his way back toward the hallway.

I guess I doze off occasionally, but I don't really sleep very well any more. Finally, though, around six o'clock, I begin to hear moving around at both ends of the hallway. Then Beth Crawford arrives, and begins making kitchen noises, which soon produce the fresh aroma of coffee brewing and breakfast-in-progress. I get up and pull on the same clothes I was wearing the previous day, use the half-bath off the living room that Floyd

must have forgotten about the night before, and then join Beth in the kitchen. During the sleepless hours that morning, I had finally determined that I would talk to her about what had apparently happened between Hannah and her father. This appears to be a good opportunity. We exchange pleasantries for a bit, and then, when there is a lull, I say, “Beth, I really need to talk to you about something that happened last night. Something woke me up and . . .”

“Good morning, everyone!” Floyd bursts into the kitchen, arms spread wide. “What a beautiful day, right, Mr. Bowen?”

Before I can answer, the two children materialize, dressed once more in their school uniforms. They chorus a soft “Good morning” and take their places at the table. Floyd joins them and motions me to the seat next to Barkley, once again directly across from Hannah. There is juice and cold cereal already on the table at the children’s places, and they busy themselves in silence, pouring small amounts of milk onto their cereal and sprinkling it with pieces of cut-up fresh fruit from a bowl on the table.

Beth calls from the kitchen, “Coffee, Mr. Bowen?”

“Yes, please,” I answer, noting that Floyd’s place is already set with a steaming mug of his own, a toasted English Muffin, buttered and jellied, and a dish of the fresh fruit all to himself.

We sit quietly, listening to the occasional tap of a spoon on one of the kid's ceramic cereal dishes. After a minute or so, my coffee arrives along with an English Muffin, also buttered and jellied. Both forearms on the table, Floyd alternately takes a bite of his muffin and then a sip of his coffee; he looks, without moving his head, first at me, then at Barkley, and then his eyes settle on Hannah and remain there as he speaks. "So! How's everybody doing this morning? Sleep well, Barkley?"

"Yes, sir." The boy replies.

Still looking at the girl ". . . and you Mr. Bowen?"

"Well, other than the . . ."

He cuts me off. "And what about you, young lady?" And he leans in toward Hannah from his place at the head of the table.

Hannah stares down at her folded hands in her lap and whispers, "Yes, sir."

"Sorry. Couldn't hear that," Floyd snaps at her. "And sit up!"

Hannah rights herself and says in a clear monotone, "Yes, sir."

"Well, that's just fine." Then he leans back and stretches a bit. "Must be the cold weather, but I don't remember sleeping

that well in a long time. “Just love this kind of weather . . . right, Mr. Bowen?”

I could feel the fury building inside me, but I still manage a, “Not really...” just before Floyd picks up his coffee mug, gets up and heads toward the kitchen. I look over at Hannah and am shocked to see the girl sitting with the palms of her hands pressed together in front of her chest, fingers pointed upwards in a prayerful gesture. Looking directly at me, she mouths the words, “Please, help me...” but then looks away quickly and picks up her spoon, and I note that Floyd has turned and is heading back to the table.

Beth joins us with just a cup of coffee, and the remaining few minutes of breakfast are spent with an endless stream of inane questions and comments directed at the children: homework done? Music lesson reminders; clean gym clothes packed? Barkely and Hannah patiently answer “Yes, m’am” “No, m’am” “thank you, m’am.” Then, when the interrogation is over, there is a chorus of, “May I be excused, please?” and off Barkley and Hannah go. Beth gets up and begins clearing the table, and I start to do the same, but Floyd makes a “sit down” gesture toward me and says quietly, “Woman’s work,” followed by a conspiratorial wink.

I can’t get out of this place fast enough, so even though it’s not true, I say to Floyd, “Well, I got a call on my cell this

morning from the airline saying I should be back at the airport by nine o'clock. So if you could call me a taxi..."

"Nonsense," says Floyd. "Airports right on my way to work, so . . . save you the cab fare." And he gets up quickly, making any further protest on my part impossible.

Before they leave, both children give me a farewell handshake, not unlike the welcoming one the night before. The only difference this morning is the pleading glance Hannah gives me during her curtsy. I can see that there are tears in her eyes.

A few minutes later, Floyd and I are heading toward the airport in his aging Toyota Corrola. At first we ride in silence, but I can't seem to let go of the look on that little girl's face this morning. "Floyd," I finally say. "You know I should be calling the cops about you."

He feigns surprise. "About me? Why, what in the world would make you say that."

"You know exactly what I'm talking about. Last night . . . with your daughter . . . with Hannah."

"Yeah?" he says with a maddening innocence. "What about it? She has these nightmares, and Beth or me has to go calm her down. Happens all the time."

“Cut the crap, Floyd,” I snap. “I heard everything . . . she was yelling at you to please stop and calling out ‘No, daddy, no!’ Then there was a lot of crying and...”

All of a sudden, Floyd is leaning in my direction patting my thigh and smiling at me. “My word against yours, pal” he says.

“What?” I reply.

“My word against yours, Arthur. Suppose what you’re thinking is really what’s happening? In the first place, it’s none of your business how I raise my kids. And if you do go talking to people about what you *think* you heard, well . . . it’ll be a stranger’s word against mine . . .” He puts his hand back on the steering wheel and shakes his head and lets out an exaggerated sigh. “I guess they’re right about ‘no good deed going unpunished.’” Trying to make himself the victim, but that doesn’t stop me. “Have you thought about how badly you’re hurting your daughter . . . probably for the rest of her life . . . what kind of father are you anyway?”

“Probably not a very good one to somebody like you.” He turns toward me with a strangely vicious look on his face. “And you missed the real show, pal. Should be there when I get Barkley to mess around with his sister.” And he grins in satisfaction as we pull up to the passenger departure zone at the small airport. I open the door and climb out, push the passenger seat back forward and reach for my carry-on. But

before I close the door, I hiss at him, “You bastard!” I lean further into the car and yell, “You’re an evil son-of-a-bitch, Crawford. Sick . . . really sick.” And with the door still open, he calls out in response, “Aren’t we all, Arthur? Aren’t we all?,” and I retreat as he pulls away from the curb, the door slamming shut with the momentum of the car.

Both furious and frustrated, I stand at the curb for a few moments and then snatch up the handle to my bag and wheel it into the airport. It turns out that I actually have two hours to wait before our flight to New York, so after I’ve checked in, I have little to do in the shamelessly unappealing Bangor Airport. I find myself too restless to be still for any length of time, so I wander into the one and only food place, buy a cup of black coffee and a sweet roll and retreat to a table next to the window. The coffee is lukewarm and tasteless; the cardboard-like pastry, inedible.

The first forty-five years of my life have been blessedly free from serious crises or angst. Little things; ups and downs; good times; not-so-good-times, of course. But what I’ve experienced in the last twelve hours doesn’t compute in my orderly, uncomplicated world. I want to shove it all away . . . somehow hit the rewind button and erase the sounds and images of last night from my being. Some part of me feels obliged to “do something.” But I don’t want to. I don’t want to bring something like this into my life, to involve myself, to go

through all that I would have to go through should I decide to pursue the violation of that sweet, helpless little girl. But I do go so far as to get up and look for a phone book. Bangor Airport is still in the dark ages of electronics, so there actually is a phone booth with a still-intact directory. I look up Floyd and Beth's listing and jot down their address and phone number. Then I begin rummaging through the yellow pages, looking for some child-services organization. I write down the name of the official, government office (DCFS), and then, for some reason, I also write down the number of the Bangor police department.

Armed with this information, I begin to feel a little better, relieved that, at least in my mind, I'm no longer alone with this problem and can hand it off any time. But I don't make any calls. It's too close to boarding time to get involved now, I tell myself, so I'll deal with this later. . . when I get to New York. I fold the piece of paper and tuck it into my shirt pocket as I head for the security check-point.

By my watch, it's exactly 11:42 a.m. when we lift off from the Bangor runway. Surrounded by a couple of hundred other New York-bound people, I begin to feel more and more in my element. I'm back in a world that I understand; in a world in which I am comfortable; in a world where problems aren't insurmountable and life is mostly predictable. A voice from the flight deck assures us that there will be no more detours, so the

mood is light and the people aboard are happy to be on their way once again. An hour and thirty-five minutes to JFK!

All should be right with the world, but I'm angry that this isn't the case with me. Hannah's plaintive looks this morning still haunt me. When I close my eyes, those visions take over. I try to do what I had told my children to do when they were young and sad about something. "Think happy thoughts," I would tell them. "Remember our trip to Disney World? And when you got to go to grandma and grandpa's farm for a week?" That kind of thing. But it doesn't help me at all.

So I try the next best thing: I begin to distance myself mentally from the ugliness of Bangor. I remind myself that, with each mile the plane flies, I am getting further and further away from all of that. The comforting hum of the jet engines helps me visualize Bangor and the Crawford home growing smaller and smaller with each minute, like a camera zooming out from a close-up. Soon it is miniscule, and then it disappears altogether, down some invisible, dark hole. Buoyed by that process, I sit up a little straighter and begin to think of the things that lie ahead of me in New York-my own little world with its own aura of importance. Work to do; family and friends; a daughter's graduation soon; competing in the country club's annual racquetball championship; Broadway tickets. What does Bangor, Maine have to do with any of that? What right does it have intruding into my life like this? "You can't save 'em all" a

colleague once told me during my brief career as a bleeding-heart school counselor. I nod to myself in approval as I recall that admonition.

I reach into my shirt pocket and pull out the list I had made in the Bangor Airport. Without looking at it, I tear it into several pieces and shove them into my empty plastic drink glass. Now I begin to feel at peace. Safely content with the bright future ahead of me.

What the hell, I think. I wasn't supposed to be in Bangor anyway.

