



JUNE 2016

THE SPIRIT OF GENEROSITY IS ALIVE AND WELL

A friend recently shared this story with us, which is a good reminder of the power of kindness to strangers.

On September 11, 2001, Delta flight 15, on a flight from Frankfurt to Atlanta, was diverted to Gander, Newfoundland. The pilots had been told that U.S. flight borders were closed, with the military controlling airspace, so the plane would have to land outside the U.S. The flight crew learned about the plane hijackings and terrorist activity in New York, but without all the details clear, they decided to tell the passengers that they had a simple instrument repair problem and would land at the nearest airport.



The flight landed in Gander at 12:30 PM Newfoundland time, and then passengers were told the story of the 9-11 attacks. All around them, they saw other planes landing—a total that soon swelled to 53. The Canadian government took charge of the airport, keeping passengers on their planes for hours. By

evening, the little town of Gander, population 10,400, would host another 10,000 guests, most of them sleeping on their planes.

The next morning, a convoy of school buses showed up and passengers were taken into the airport to go through immigration and register with the Red Cross. Then people were sent to sleeping facilities to await news.

Gander and the surrounding towns closed their high schools and converted all meeting halls into mass lodging for the stranded travelers. Families were kept together, elderly passengers were assigned to private homes, and people with medical issues were located near medical facilities. All the area high school students were required to volunteer their time to take care of the “plane people.”

Delta Flight 15 passengers were sent to Lewisporte, where residents brought them blankets, shampoo, shaving cream, toys and books from their own homes. Local bakeries stayed open to make fresh bread for the guests. Residents prepared food

and took it to the schools and meeting halls. Local families picked up used towels each day and returned clean ones the next day. And when they learned that U.S. airports were reopened, all the passengers were delivered to the airport on time, without one person missing or late. The Red Cross had each passenger's name and location, and it matched them to the plane schedules.

On the Delta 15 flight back to the U.S., the passengers, by now fond friends with their hosts in Lewisporte, decided to set up a trust fund for the high school students of Lewisporte, in thanks for the generosity of the local families. Before they landed, the passengers had collected \$15,000 in pledges. That fund has since grown to \$1.5 million and has assisted 200 Lewisporte students in their college education.

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