

Home at Last

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My seventeen days in eastern Europe were tiring, exhilarating, eye-opening, and quite wonderful for many reasons, but it is good to be back home and dealing with the laundry, phone calls, mail, dog, and groceries, not necessarily in that order.

GETTING home was a bit of a chore.

For starters, British Airways had printed my name backwards on my ticket. I didn't notice. I glanced at my ticket when it arrived and saw Lois/Lowry and it seemed correct. Wrong. It should have said Lowry/Lois.

The person at the British Airways ticket counter noticed the error when I checked in, leaving Boston, but chuckled and said it wouldn't matter. Really said that. I asked, when she pointed out the reversal of names, "How much of a problem is that going to be?" "None," she lied.

My mis-named ticket got me to London, and from London to Vienna. I went by ground transportation to Prague and Bratislava and Budapest.

Then, night before last, in a Budapest hotel, I went to the British Airways website and tried to check in on-line, the night before my morning flight. And it mattered. I got cryptic messages from British Airways telling me that I would need to check in at the airport because there was a, ah, problem.

At the airport in Budapest, a city where language is a bit of a barrier, it mattered. The name on my ticket didn't match the name on my passport.

In Budapest, the day before, I had watched a documentary film about Imre Nagy, the leader of the 1956 Hungarian uprising, who was executed by the Soviets two years after that tragic set of events. I had noticed, during the film, that he was referred to as Nagy Imre. That should have been a clue that I would encounter problems at the airport.

I will not bore you with the lengthy details of a long and frequently frustrating day, since you can see that I have finally arrived home even though there were moments when I thought I might be detained in a country with a language that bears no resemblance to anything I speak or understand.

But in the midst of frustration and exasperation there is almost always a funny moment, For me it was this. I was standing in the midst of an endless slow-moving line in security at Heathrow Airport. I had replied correctly to all the questions I'd been asked about my lack of a boarding pass (they wouldn't give me one in Budapest because my ticket name didn't match my passport name), liquids, gels, carry-on luggage, etc. etc. Then I was asked, by a uniformed airport person (male), "Where are you traveling to?"

I said "Boston."

And he said, "Virgin?"

And until I realized he was referring to an airline, I came veerrry close to replying, "Not for many years."

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