



When Nicholas was 3 ½ years old, we moved from Columbus, Ohio to Phoenix, AZ. Our course to Phoenix was a rather strange one. The time of year was September and as we coordinated our move of worldly possessions across the country in the middle of summer we ran into the reality of the relocation package. The movers would move anything, but would not guarantee safety of valuables.

As we took stock in our house, we quickly determined that it would be best for “peace of mind” if we drove a vehicle to Phoenix and had it loaded with possessions that we didn’t feel were appropriate for the movers. Knowing that this meant that we were highly likely to move the valuables from the minivan into the hotel room and back during the evening – it still provided a greater sense of comfort that hoping all went well with the movers.

As we coordinated schedules, we also thought we would try to visit family in Wisconsin one more time before we left for Arizona. Besides, Katie makes wedding cakes and she had committed to make one for her niece in September in Wisconsin anyways. So it was decided, we would go to Wisconsin, and then to Arizona. We decided that Katie would fly with Paige and Nicholas to Wisconsin and be picked up by family, while I would stay the last night, get the movers out, clean the house, and drive to Wisconsin in the van.

As the flight time approached in Columbus, we got everyone in the van to the airport. Since Columbus was only about 8 hours drive time from Southern Wisconsin we generally drive back during holidays and other events to provide flexibility in leaving times and save expense on flights. This time we decided to fly, but we didn’t properly educate and prepare Nicholas for the adventure. We had been on planes with Nicholas, and he didn’t particularly like them.

It was a rainy day, and the weather was causing some delays at the airport, but nothing serious. We went to check in and followed our typical routine. One of us (mom or dad) would stand in line with the luggage, while the other would position themselves sufficiently away from the check in line so Nicholas and Paige weren’t cramped, yet close enough we could approach the counter when the other was called for ID.

Nicholas and Paige were not patient. Cramped check-in lines qualified as anxiety inducers and over time we were able to diffuse much of it by placing the kids on the periphery. This one was no different. After several minutes of check in at the counter, checking ID’s and answering lame security questions, we were ticketed (Katie, Nicholas and Paige) for Milwaukee. The plane had 2 across seating – meaning that Nicholas sat by Mom, and Paige was across the aisle.

Paige was a great traveler. Give her a set of crayons, white paper and a few snacks and she would travel the world. She was talkative and would talk with anyone about anything. Inquisitive and polite, she could strike up conversation with a mime. She was irresistible. That helped with what was to come.



At this time, non-ticketed family members were allowed to proceed through security towards the gates. The security lines were not as intensive in 1999, but still crowded. The airports still liked cattle lines, and this close proximity only served to raise the anxiety of Mr. Nicholas. He would try to lean against you, against other people, try to walk away and pretty much became a 100% time occupation. Then we had to walk through the security gate, without touching the walls, another challenge.

Once through, we had to reassemble the family and proceed to the gate. In the airport, there was a long distance to the gate, which helped release some tension since he could walk ahead of us, but unfortunately, down by the gate where flights were delayed there were more people. It was typical that we would go for walks with Nicholas around the airport to try and diffuse the anxiety before boarding. This was starting early today.

The flight was announced as delayed since a storm system was entering the county. They couldn't tell us how long, just that it was delayed. Stay close, they said. They obviously didn't have a Nicholas to work with. We went for walks, and used hand signals to flag each other. We used the rest rooms. We took walks. Finally, Katie took Nicholas to the restroom. Just as they entered, they announced that they had a small break in the storm and they wanted to board the plane, now!

Paige and I ran to the bathroom and called for Katie and Nicholas. By the time we got back to the gate, we lost the "pre-boarding with small children" announcement and the line for entry to plane was long. This was going to be a challenge with Nicholas, but if anyone could do it, mom could. I kissed them all good-bye and wished her luck. I told Paige to be helpful, she promised she would.

As they boarded I saw that Nicholas was having a hard time. I heard the rest of the story that evening. All I could see from the gate area was a rush to board the plane. The plane disappeared to the right down the taxi road to take off and the take-off. I'd never seen such a rush to leave. In the distance there was lightening, thunderstorms and a nice afternoon Midwestern storm. They got out. Hopefully the 1 ½ hour flight would go fast.

Later that night, I learned the hell on the plane. Katie was in the back of the plane. She carried, cajoled, pushed, and otherwise encouraged Nicholas to keep walking, all the while carrying all the carry on luggage. When she finally arrived at the seats, she got the baby seat on the plane seat and called for Nicholas to climb in. He proceeded to climb under the seat in front of them and scream, "I don't want to be on the plane". This provided a nice backdrop to the rest of the customers who did want to be on the plane and did want to leave asap.

Katie got him out from under the seat, and placed him in the chair. All the time, telling Paige what to do with her carry on luggage of crayons, what seat to take, and asked her to wait until she could get back to her. Then Katie spent some time to try to settle Nicholas down and get him



strapped in the baby seat. She was successful, but with several customers providing disapproving glances. The world has a way of being completely unsympathetic to people, and usually without knowing all the facts.

The plane took off and Nicholas began to settle down. While the flight was short, it provided its share of challenges. When anxiety ridden, Nicholas does not like to do anything, yet is quickly bored. Katie would read books, get crayons, and get treats. But as with most kids when they get worked up, there is nothing that soothes them except getting off the plane.

Upon landing in Milwaukee, decompression would hit Nicholas pretty good and his ears would hurt. Then once landed, he wanted off. Frequent refrains of “I want off” would come. No amount of talking or distraction would help at this age. Only patience. Even a 1 ½ hour flight can feel like a full days struggle sometimes. While I was not on this flight, there were several flights that mom and dad together could not settle down the troops. I felt bad for Nicholas. I felt bad for Paige. And I felt bad for mom. It shouldn’t have to be that hard.

Our lesson with Nicholas that day and every day we fly is that we have to constantly tell him what to expect. What happens when we get on the plane. What he can do on the plane. Gameboys are good distraction now that he is older. Other toys now distract him. When we land we can distract him to look out windows and watch activities while the rest of the plane empties. Airline travel is hard, but as he gets older it gets easier.