

Fay

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Thanks to a suggestion from a former mayor of Fort Wayne, I read a book by Michelle Moore, [Rural Renaissance: Revitalizing America's Hometowns through Clean Power](#). Intrigued, I invited the author to be the keynote speaker at the [Indiana Sustainability and Resilience Conference](#). She said yes!

Later, I found out that her organization, *Groundswell*, was holding a conference in Bentonville, Arkansas called [The Rural Renaissance Roadshow](#). I had to go! Bentonville was the place for a couple of remarkable *Heartland Summits* I attended and the content was in sync with the program I run for the *IU Environmental Resilience Institute* called the *Indiana Resilience Funding Hub*, which is focused on rural communities.

After getting the necessary permissions to attend, I told our administrative coordinator I like to handle my own flight reservations. That way I get the departure and arrival times that suit me along with my kind of seats. I can also look for itineraries with the lowest emissions. For short flights, I go for the window. For long flights, go for the aisle.

From past experience, I remembered flying into Fayetteville's airport, which is about 20 minutes from Bentonville. I found a brief time slot between meetings and started searching for IND-FAY round-trip flights that matched my criteria and were economical for our travel budget.



Michelle Moore and William M. Brown at the 2024 Indiana Sustainability and Resilience Conference.

What I found seemed too good to be true:

I could leave IND at 12:15 pm, arrive at CLT at 1:52 pm, and arrive at FAY at 3:47 pm! No early morning nonsense – arrive in plenty of time to get settled in before the opening ceremony. But why Charlotte? I assumed that it must be an American Airlines hub and they had the most options. The flight from CLT to FAY was only an hour and 4 minutes, but I assumed that was due to the time change flying from ET to CT. Our administrative coordinator was impressed with the duration, cost, and efficiency of the itinerary. Only 512 pounds of CO₂ equivalent to makeup, only slightly more than driving my old Prius.

It was immediately apparent that the pandemic slowdown in air travel was over. I found a very crowded parking system and terminal. I was happy I had arrived early as it took an hour to get through TSA. The flight from IND to CLT ran late; a glance at the flight board showed I had 10 minutes to get from Concourse A to Concourse E for my flight to FAY. A digital sign noted that the time to walk to E from A was 14 minutes. I didn't walk, but the



shoulder-to-shoulder crowds greatly impeded my sprint with my carry-on gliding behind me, ricocheting off other travelers and their bags. Huffing and sweating, I was alarmed to see the gate for CLT-FAY had no boarding line. Had it already taken off? No, the attendant assured me, but I was the last aboard and I would need to check my carry-on.

My assembled fellow passengers registered their dismay with my late arrival with laser eyes, but I felt blessed to have made it, and I was on to my “final destination” on time! By the time they had my bag stowed, the doors were all closed, and the plane was rolling back from the gate. My heart rate had come down, and I was filled with relief. I’ll soon be sipping wine at the opening reception with my new friends in Bentonville. I noted that the plane was a short hopper with just one row of seats on my side and two on the other. Reminded me of the kinds of small jets I used to board for the short trip home from IND to EVV years ago. I took a deep breath and thought it might be a good time for a short nap.

“Welcome to flight 5836 to Fayetteville,” the pseudo-friendly flight attendant announced. “Flying time is 20 minutes!”

My recovered heart fell to the floor with a sudden realization! There could only be one explanation. I was flying to the wrong Fayetteville! Of course, Fayetteville, North Carolina! My mind was speeding through thoughts in a panic, along with a replay of that old Olympics commercial where the ski jumper sailed off the edge of the ski jump and tumbled awkwardly, bouncing off the edge on the way down, down, down as snow flew in all directions – “The thrill of victory. The agony of defeat.” I will never live this down.

Realizing how hard it might be to get from a regional airport to the other, Fayetteville, which I also remembered at that exact moment, was XNA (for Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport?), not FAY. Heart pounding in my head, I had the urge to jump up and demand to return to the gate. I knew that would not be successful, especially since I had my bag stowed in the hold. Next, I pulled out my cell phone and took it out of flight mode (perhaps they would throw me off the plane?) and frantically started searching for flights to XNA. Nothing. All flights were full. I would have to bolt to the nearest ticket agent and see what magic they might have up their sleeve. That was the longest short flight of my life, knowing I was going in the wrong direction and stewing in my own cesspool of embarrassment and dejection. My God, what will Michelle Moore think?

At last, after being handed off by another agent, I was able to find a friendly, patient



ticket agent who empathized with me, noting that another flier from IND had the same experience a week before. The best option he found, looking at a slew of options, while the line grew restless behind me, was an all-night, all-day itinerary that would get me to XNA in time for the closing reception at 5 pm the next day. He suggested that maybe I should just try to get back home so I could at least spend a productive day in the office the next day. He booked a return trip that would have me back to IND after midnight, but I would have to drive to Raleigh-Durham International (RDU) to catch a flight back to CLT, then back to IND. No additional charge.

Next challenge: find a rental car or taxi to RDU. I dreaded heading to the rental desks. One-way rental with no reservation? You're kidding, right? After I explained my plight to the desk clerk and his new trainee, he said to wait while they conferred with the mythical manager in the back room. As this seemed to be taking a lot more time than I had to spare, I began to look at the other rental desks thinking maybe I should start a competition. The pair finally came back with an option they called the last car on the lot.

"It is fully fueled and ready to go," they said. "Be sure to give us a good rating on the survey that you will receive."

I filled out the paperwork and grabbed the key without asking about the vehicle. Any wheels would work. When I walked out to the large lot, I confirmed that there was only one car, a KIA Niro. After I sat down, it became apparent that this was an EV! A tiny bright ray of sunshine illuminated the dark landscape of my crumpled soul. I had been shopping for an EV to replace my 2013 Prius, but none of the lots in town had one. This cute little car was showing 256 miles of range for my 78-mile trip. Perfect!



Life is full of surprises. Many are unpleasant self-inflicted wounds. They often arise from mistakes I am too distracted to catch, even when they are spelled out before my eyes. All those events seem to be random and unconnected at the time, but what I learn from each misadventure seems to converge with the continuous current of meaning and purpose in my life.



I returned to work the following day with a blank calendar and a sad tale of incompetence. On a whim, I went to the Kia dealer over lunch, and they had an IU-red Kia Niro EV featured in front of their showroom. The salesperson asked if I wanted a test drive. I said no. How much for my Prius?



I call her Fay. She gets charged on sunny weekends with the solar array behind my barn, perhaps paying back that 512 pounds of CO₂ over time. I was able to [access all the presentations](#) from the conference after they were posted, and I donated to ERI to cover my travel error and save staff from figuring out how to back that out.

About a week after the conference, Fay and I were sitting at an intersection at a major bypass on my short commute to campus. A large truck was in the turn lane to my left, blocking my view of oncoming traffic. When the light turned green, I pressed the accelerator expecting to feel that robust torque produced by my new EV as I blasted across the four lanes. Instead, I was miffed when nothing happened except for a curious warning tone – then a vehicle zipped in front of me in a blur from the left – having run the red light very late, at very high speed.



If I had been driving my old Prius, with none of the new safety warning systems, I most likely would have pulled out in front of the speeder and been T-boned on the driver's side. I'm not sure I would be writing this if that had happened. I'm not sure if any of these events are connected, but I like to think that something positive came out of my flight to the wrong Fayetteville.

Ultimately, I will arrive at my final destination, with a frayed roadmap generously doodled with unintended detours and sweet memories of helpful guides along the way.