

## Gate D-1 For Jackson

I travel by air several times a year. It seems that there are no direct flights out of Jackson and that our passage to the world always leads through Atlanta. It also seems that our planes are small planes, what people often refer to as, “puddle jumpers.” When you leave Jackson, there might be three planes in the airport, *if* it is busy. When you land in Atlanta, there are so many planes it is hard to imagine how so many planes can fly at the same time.

When arriving in Atlanta from a destination and returning to Jackson, there is no need to look at the board for what gate the flight to Jackson is leaving; it is always, “D-1”. Gate D-1 is the very last gate in gate D. It is the longest walk possible in the airport. If your flight lands a little late, you have to hustle to make it to Gate D-1.

As I am hustling through the busy airport, I often find myself wondering if I will be able to hear and see the tell tale signs of Gate D-1 to Jackson. I don’t know why I wonder, because the same thing always happens. At most gates, the people are quiet. They are usually reading or playing on their computer. But its not like that at Gate D-1 to Jackson. I can always hear the Gate before I get there. People are standing and gesticulating and laughing and talking. There are always several groups engaged in some big conversation. The people there are usually equal numbers of Blacks and Whites, and race doesn’t separate the groups of people talking.

I have a game I play when I hear Gate D-1. I wonder if I am going to know the usual number of people: six. I always know six people on the flight. So, when I arrive, I start looking and counting. Every time, its six. One time I had met only four of my friends from Jackson at Gate D-1. The time to depart was near and I became nervous, so I remarked to one of my Jackson friends, “You know, I always know six people on the flight back to Jackson, but I am

concerned, I have only seen four this time.” He laughed, and said, “I know what you mean.” But then he stopped and his eyes got wide and he said, “Hey, you know Joe and Susan over there from Jackson, don’t you?” I looked over, and sure enough, I knew Joe and Susan over there. My quota of six was filled. We laughed again.

One day, as we boarded the plane, people laughing and carrying on, the flight attendant smiled and gave us a special greeting. She seemed to be really enjoying herself. Later, as she walked up and down the aisle, she exclaimed, “This flight is a mess with all these people from Mississippi carrying on and having a good time.” Everyone laughed and the kidding and talking with the flight attendant began.

I was seated all the way at the back. The plane was crowded. The seats in back began to fill up. A couple of young men started making their way to the back. They were wearing rap type clothes like the ones the Jackson City Council is trying to ban. They came in and sat down across the aisle from me. Suddenly, one of the young men exclaimed, “Darn, I’m sitting right next to the alternator.” He said it in a way that he was joking but still concerned. It was the engine, which on that type of plane sits right outside a rear window. I laughed and said, “That’s the engine.” He said, “The engine! ‘Looks like an alternator to me and I am not sitting next to it.” He had the whole back of the plane laughing with him and he and his buddy switched seats so he was not next to the alternator. That flight ended up being one of the most fun flights I have ever been on as the two young men and I and the others at the back of the plane enjoyed exchanging stories and laughs.

The flights back from Atlanta are always less than an hour and I am always glad to get back to Jackson, even if it does mean driving down bumpy Ridgewood Road again.

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