

Day 43 – From Santiago to Puerto Rico [Saturday 05-Mar-2011]

We had our alarms on in the room and we got up at 6:30AM. We only got 3 ½ hours sleep. It helped, but not much. We showered and headed down to eat breakfast. While Lilli arranged food for us I went down to the hotel desk, to look for a LAN representative. It was now 6:55AM. She looked me in the eyes and said that the bus was leaving, now. Huh? I thought it was 7:20AM.

Through an extended conversation, I got a new taxi voucher so that we could ride into the airport on our own. Since I was worried about our connections, I yanked Lilli out of the restaurant and we headed out to the taxi right away. It did not take long to get into the airport.

Perhaps this was a stroke of luck, but when we got to the Santiago Airport I marched up to LAN service desk with no waiting line. They changed our connecting flights to Guadeloupe without hassle or fees. They told us we needed to work out hotel items with the LAN Airline in Miami, once we got there. I am cautiously optimistic, but this is not a home run yet.

I went down to check on the Kindle again, at the Lost-and-Found area. No, they had not found it. To be sure, they showed me the locked cages where they kept items they had picked up. It is just incredible what people leave behind. Passports, laptops, liquor, toys, books, papers, etc, etc.

We then got new boarding passes and ensured that our luggage tags were properly transferred. With our breakfast vouchers still good, we ate breakfast at the Santiago Airport before going through immigrations back out to the terminal.



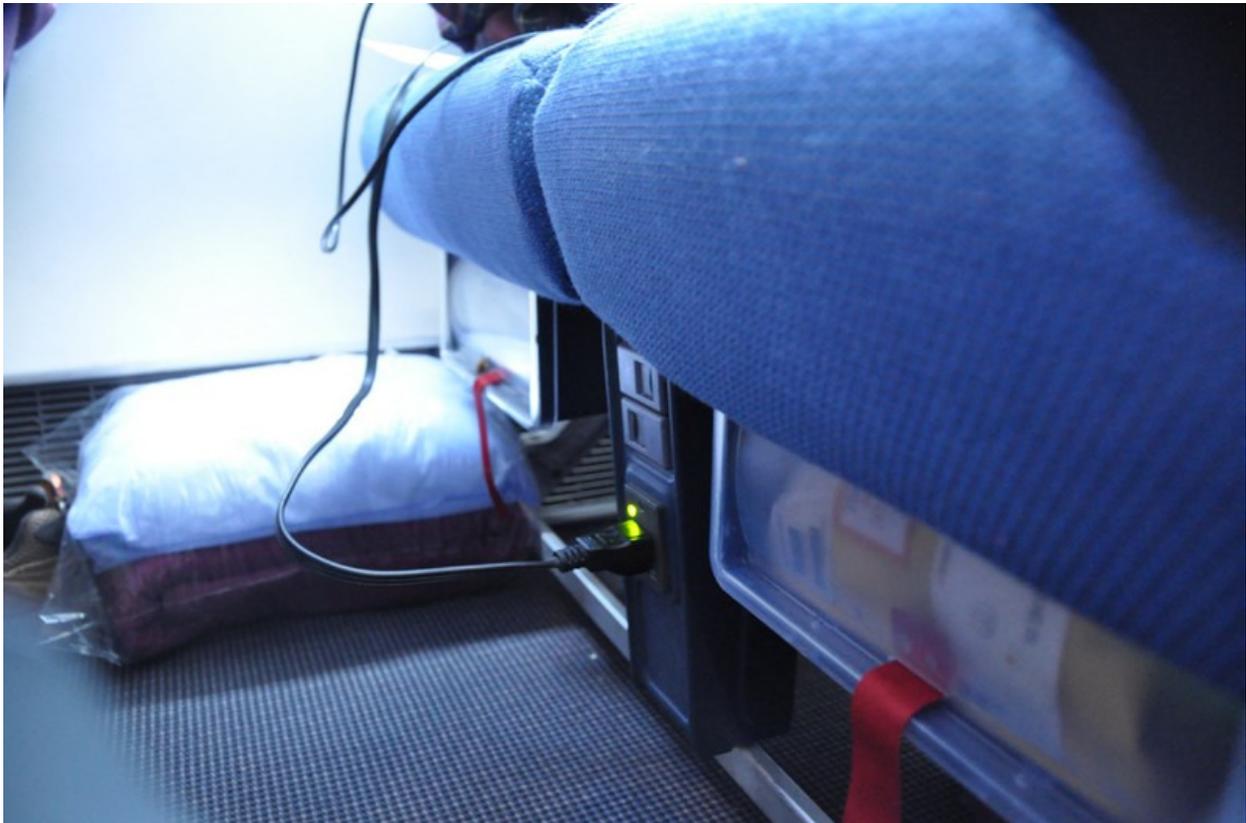
Back in line at the Santiago Airport to get a re-issued boarding pass for Miami

We chatted with other passengers at the gate who had also gotten rescheduled. One older couple had been en-route to a 60th birthday gathering in Florida and was beyond hope of reaching that party on time. I felt really sorry for them.



Lilli loaded up with breakfast at the Santiago airport in Chile before going to the gate

Once on the plane I realized that we had not received our duty-free liquor that I bought last night. They were supposed to have that waiting at the plane. Through some detective work the Tax Free representative showed up at our plane with our bag. I could really have used that booze last night, but it was stuck at the airport, of course.



Albeit hard to find, the power plugs under the airplane seats are great!

The flight over to Miami was fairly nice. The food was alright. They had instant coffee, which I am not a great fan of.



Lilli is enjoying some in-flight entertainment on the flight from Santiago to Miami

Getting through customs and immigrations in Miami was a snap. We dashed off to the LAN Airlines counters to get our supposed hotel voucher for Puerto Rico. And we ran into more BS from them again:

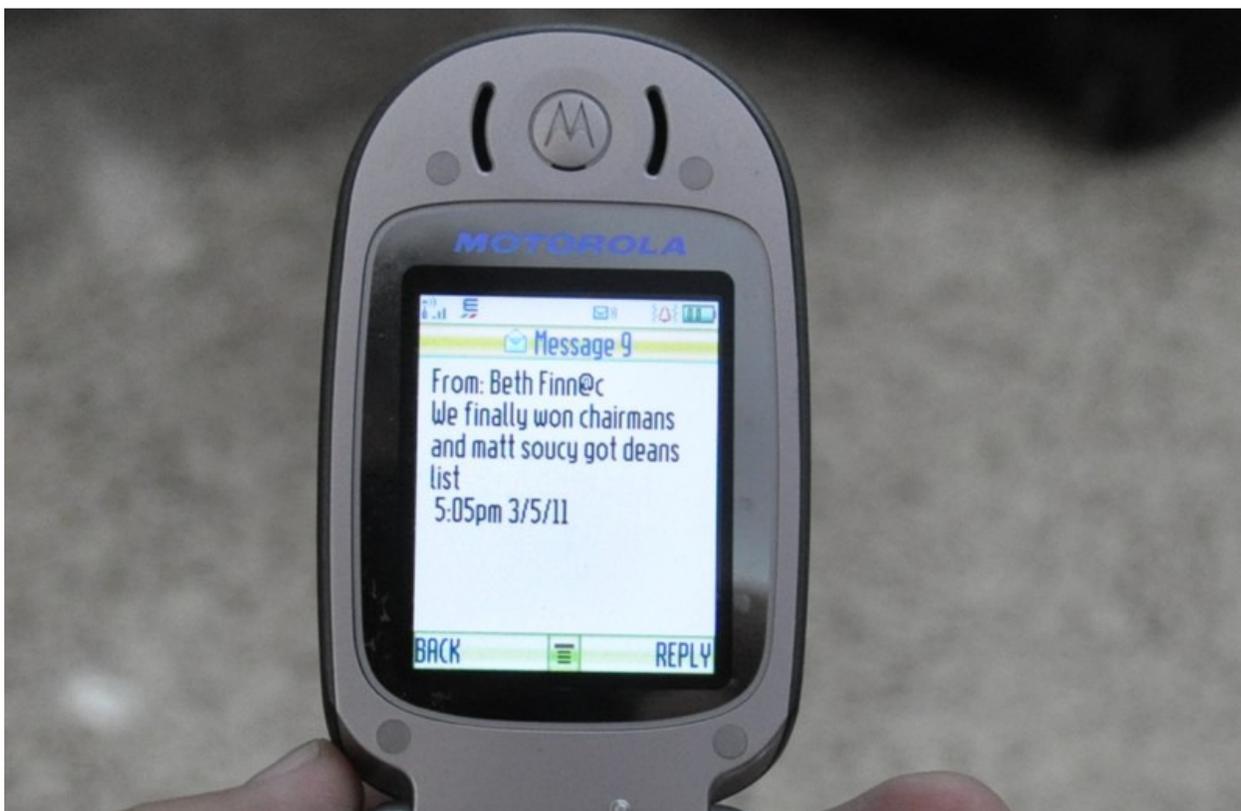
1. There was no formal LAN disk. Instead, they had the regular check-in counters. And there were tons of people in line to check in.
2. After explaining my situation to an usher, I was directed to a line labeled Flight Control. I waited there for some time. When it finally was my turn, the guy behind the counter told me that I had to be in another line.
3. I got over into the other line and waited for my turn. When I finally reached the female clerk, I explained my situation. First she did not know where Puerto Rico or Guadeloupe was. Then, after explaining things, she started working the issue in a half-ass way. She did not really want to help me so came up with several excuses.
 - a. First she tried to push the problem on American Airlines.
 - b. Next, she told me that I should speak with the LAN representative in Puerto Rico. I asked if they would be open when I got there (at midnight) she said Yes. I then asked if LAN actually flew to Puerto Rico and, hence, even had a representative there. After some scurrying around, she came back and said No.
 - c. Next, she told me that I must speak with a supervisor and that he was coming. I waited for 10 minutes more and nobody showed up to help me.
4. In disgust I walked around all the counters until I could find a person that looked like a supervisor. I explained the situation to him. In the end, he told me that he could not issue me a voucher and that I had to pay for the hotel myself and then file an expense claim with them, explaining my situation. I asked if that would be as “easy” as this flight from Santiago and he just shrugged his shoulders. He eventually handed me a meal voucher, that I could not use due to lack of time with our connecting flight.

In the end, it was a total waste of time to speak with LAN about the hotel. I can honestly say that they are not very service oriented. Everyone tries to push the problem on someone else. I feel like I have “**stepped on a LAN mine**”. I think their name must stand for **Late Always Normal**.

At this point, we were late for our connection to Puerto Rico. We had to run to the other side of the airport for the American Airlines counters. As we checked in, the AA clerk ripped off our name tags because “they came from other airlines”. What the hell! I did not have time to argue.



Standing in line for the Miami to Puerto Rico flight



This is big. Good news about our Robotics team from Granite State Regional in NH

We rushed through security and to the gate for the flight and realized that we did not have a seat assignment. That meant staying in line, again. We finally had that sorted out.

While at the airport I received a text message from one of my co-mentors on the FIRST Robotics team back in Merrimack, where they were taking part in the season's first regional competition. The team had won the Chairman's award which is the top award. Horray. I am proud to be the top financial sponsor of this team. Karl also sent me text messages and he sounded pretty chippy too. This now made the team automatically eligible to travel to the main national event, if they can raise the funds. Otherwise they'll just do the planned trip to Las Vegas.

The plane was a vintage 757 with a yellow tinge to the interiors. I instinctively looked for ash trays in the arm rests, to help date it. It had a small number of overhead CRTs in the center of the aisle. It felt like this plane must have been part of the Berlin airlift back in the day. But we made it to Puerto Rico Ok. Its odd to note that most airlines outside of the US have more modern airplanes than they do inside of the US. Perhaps this is a sign of times to come.

We picked up our baggage and headed for the departure area of the airport. Pretty much everything was closed there. We saw a small number of stranded passengers. We struck up a conversation with a couple from Minnesota who were waiting to board a boat the next day.

Lilli bought some food at a 24 hour Subway shop in the airport. We ate and then got ready to nap for the evening. We now have 14 hours of waiting ahead of us for the flight to Guadeloupe. Fortunately, we have camping gear with us so it was not hard to pull out a sleeping bag and a pad to make myself comfortable.