

Kate McNeilis swam to her first Olympic Trial cut at the long course invitational attached to the US Short Course Nationals. It was no miracle that she performed as well as she did, that was a result of a talented young lady who has put forth a lot of effort in preparation. In fact her results were pretty predictable. However, what we experienced on our first day in Atlanta, Georgia was beyond the expected and truly incredible.

A crisp blue sky was the tapestry for our flight from Dayton to Atlanta on a brilliant Thursday morning. Arriving well ahead of schedule as a result of a welcomed run of the mill flight we embarked on the two thousand meter walk-ride to the baggage claim. That's where this story begins and a true miracle occurs.

Observing the number of bags the ladies were attempting to carry, I, being the gentleman 'my mama taught me to be,' insisted on carrying the backpack Kate was adding to her mother's load. A short walk lead us to the MARTA (Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transport Authority, aka the "train that gets you around Atlanta). Figuring out how to purchase a ticket from one of the machines separates the well traveled from the ... well, us! Looking totally confused a well trained MARTA attendant came to our rescue. Clicking through the instructions our MARTA whiz quickly produced our three tickets. Now we were left needing just one more bit of important information; so in true Disney bloodhound form I asked, "Which way da we go?" Enter stage left another helpful MARTA attendant. After receiving specific instructions regarding which train to take and the specific stop to disembark near our hotel we grabbed our bags and set off to catch a train. Approaching our train we jump on like veteran riders and bumble to our seats like the novices we really are. Seated comfortably amongst a host of travelers making people watching comparable to an all-you-can-eat desert bar, we settled in for a twenty five minute ride on the northbound to North Avenue. Just three stops beyond Five Points, as instructed, we jumped off the train following the small crowd climbing the stairs ascending toward street level. It was at this time that Kate uttered three words that could have stopped the train in its tracks as it did my heart in that split second, "where's my bag?" she asked. Missing a bright blue Speedo backpack is not like losing your keys where you search every pocket, purse, and briefcase and then start over again. The bag was gone! The dilemma was determining whether it actually made it on the train or was it still heading up the tracks as we froze in disbelief. Tracking down a third member of the friendliest crew in the country I was glad MARTA assistance was not billed by the hour. Less than hopeful that we would see the bag again she put out an A-P-B and promised to call me "no matter what" at her 3:00P shift change.

Taking the escalator the final fifty feet to the earth's surface and making a short walk across the street to the Renaissance Hotel we tried to figure out exactly what was in the bag and how the loss of such would change the course of the weekend. For perhaps the first time in her life Kate followed her dad's suggestion and packed her competition suit and goggles in her carry-on; that act alone took a serious bite out of the potential loss. Dad one, coach zero! With the exception of her once used competition suit, new sandals and a very expensive camera the damage was relatively minor. Pictures that procrastination left un-downloaded were both emotionally upsetting and irreplaceable. It appeared the loss of the remaining contents was more of an inconvenience than necessity. Regardless this quick trip to Atlanta was getting very expensive in a hurry.

After checking in to our rooms, I spent a few moments in prayer and then called the master of lost item retrieval, my wife Anita. She of course lectured me on how I should be back on that train heading for the airport. Not practical I noted and set out to meet Kate and Cyndi (Kate's mom) for lunch and a quick trip to the pool for a warm-up. As if there is some innate mechanism in mom's that drive them to do the illogical, Cyndi, announced she would be; you got it, heading down to the airport to look for the bag.

Fast forwarding a couple hours, we are back from the pool, Cyndi returned empty handed from the airport, our MARTA friend never called and we are now sitting in a restaurant near the hotel staring at a menu that is written in English but looking very foreign. After some serious deliberation and the fact they had already served us bread and drinks we decided to be adventurous and stick it out and selected our main entrees. Finding it difficult to keep the loss of the bag out of the conversation our miracle revealed itself in the sound of a ring tone to Kate's phone. A quick "hello" reveals Robin Cornette (age grouper Laura Cornette's mom) on the other end informing Kate the Atlanta Police Department was trying to locate her to return a swim bag! WOW, this was as confusing as it was exciting. The soft lit ambiance of this quaint restaurant prevented us from leaving our seats and jumping up and down, but the celebration non-the-less was exuberant. We could not believe it, lost bag in Atlanta and the police were finding us to return it. Take that you negative, never will you see that bag again, not here in Atlanta, not in a million years, goodbye camera –hello ditch, say-ers of gloom and doom. You underestimated the power of prayer and the good folks on the Atlanta police department.

OK, wait, you're still confused, as were we. How in the world did Mrs. Cornette receive the call? I'll tell you how, one very special cop in Atlanta took it upon himself to do what it took, going well over and beyond the call of duty to do some detective work and find Kate. You see the bag was picked up as a suspicious bag at the MARTA ticket machines, yes, where I left it, and one way or another found its way to Officer Lindahl's office. Searching the contents he determined it was specialized equipment and the owner must be in need of this bag. The airline baggage claim ticket had Kate's name on it so he "Googled" her to reveal numerous articles about her accomplishments. The Google search also lead him to the WAC website where he attempted to get a hold of Coach David, who at that time was at practice. Robin's name appears with phone number under the Booster Board contacts and thus the call.

Up to this point were just short of cartwheels and somersaults and to say happy would be an extreme under-statement. However, we still didn't have the bag and were unsure of what may have been taken from it. The second we hung up with Robin I grabbed the phone and called Officer Lindahl not knowing what to expect. As fate would have it we crossed paths with what may very well be the nicest policeman in Atlanta, perhaps the country. Our short conversation confirmed the whereabouts of the bag and ended with his willingness to deliver the bag to the hotel. I offered to come to the station and pick up the bag, but, he would have nothing to do with it insisting I call when we get back to the hotel. Absolutely amazing! Not only were we getting the bag back but it was being delivered.

Thirty minutes later we are back in the hotel lobby and Officer Lindahl answers his phone, "sure I'll be there in 10 minutes." Never has there been a more welcomed site then seeing Atlanta's finest come through the lobby's revolving door clutching a royal blue Speedo backpack. Finally the ordeal comes to an end; the bag is in Kate's hand, and all the contents confirmed. A true miracle had unfolded before our eyes. Never underestimate the power of prayer, the innate goodness of total strangers, and the hospitality of the South. And, never, ever agree to let me carry your bag! Day 2