Mandy and I were married on March 24, 1985. As our 20th wedding anniversary approached we discussed what we should do to celebrate. Mandy enjoys searching for good deals and planning trips so I gave her the option of me making all the arrangements and surprising her, me making the arrangements but keeping her posted as they progressed or her making the arrangements. She decided that she would like to make the arrangements herself. As we discussed where we should go, I indicated that the most important part of the celebration was for me to be with her. To me, the destination was not as important as long as we were together. I said that I would be happy to get a hotel in Anderson, SC or go anywhere in the world. Mandy appreciated the sentiment but Anderson was not on the short list of potential destinations. She began to investigate the different possibilities and finally decided to go to Budapest, Hungary.

The departure from Aiken was set for 4:30 p.m. on Monday, March 7, 2005. We made most of the preparations the day before so that the departure would go smoothly, which it did. About half way to the airport in Atlanta, I began to get tired so we switched drivers. Within about ten minutes of the switch, it began to rain and developed into a down poor by the time we reached the terminal. I dropped off Mandy and the baggage and then parked the car. By the time I rejoined Mandy I was quite wet.

The check in went very smoothly and we boarded the plane with no difficulty. It looked as though we were going to have an open seat in our row until at the last minute an elderly lady sat down beside Mandy. It was clear that this particular lady grew up and spent most of her life in a very arid climate where water was a scarce commodity. She had not changed her bathing habits during her stay in the United States, which was evidenced by the bodily aroma emanating from her seat. We looked forward to a lovely, 9.5-hour flight.

About 20 minutes into the flight, the attendants distributed packets of items that included earplugs, eye covering to keep out the light, headphones to hear the audio provided through the armrest and some pills whose purpose we did not know. There was no olfactory control mechanism, however. We each had our own TV monitor that was built into the seat in front of us. I decided to watch *Sky Captain* and Mandy flipped around because there was nothing particularly interesting to her, although she did watch an episode of *MacGyver*.

Soon, we were served our dinner, which consisted of salmon salad, choice of fish or beef, bread, brie cheese, apple sauce, some dessert thing, water and a choice of beverage. We were not quite sure what to do with the 1/16 teaspoon included with the flatware, napkin and condiments. We enjoyed the dinner and the entertainment for a while and then tried to get some sleep.

The earplugs and eye covering were very helpful in drowning out the outside stimuli and providing an opportunity for some sleep. Sleeping in a sitting position has never been
something I do well. Of course, I am often able to snooze during a football game on a Sunday afternoon but that is not a deep sleep. There was no deep sleep on the docket for either of us during our plane ride. At some point during our trip and before sunrise, I woke up with a start. I felt cold, clammy and very nauseous. It was all that I could do to communicate to Mandy and then the stewardess that I wanted one of those “special bags.” For some reason there was no bag in the seat pocket in front of me and I was in dire need of one. By the time I obtained one, I was unable to make use of it. The next sensation was of stomach cramping and incredible weakness. If I felt a little better, I think I would have crawled to the bathroom and been happy to meet my maker to get some relief. Fortunately it was not yet my time. About an hour later, I did manage to go to the restroom but there was no activity of any kind. While I was in the bathroom someone tried very hard to get in. There was a clear sign that read occupied and the door was locked so I felt there was no compelling reason for me to provide any further information regarding the use of the toilet. When I disembarked from the bathroom I had the first hint if humor since my escapade began. The desert lady who smelled like a camel and was assigned to the seat next to Mandy was the one trying to get into the bathroom! I decided to provide her some assistance with the lavatory door because she was having difficulty managing it and her cane at the same time.

The remainder of the flight was spent alternating between a few moments of sleep, a few moments discomfort and a few moments of agony. The only interruption was when they presented us with the option to enjoy breakfast but we both decided that we would pass on the offer. After a few hours of this pleasant cycle the long awaited landing was upon us. The landing was not the smoothest on record and in my current physical state caused me to be a little more sensitive than normal. The landing proved to be a sufficient catalyst and I was finally able to make use of the special bag. It was quite evident that my body had confined my entire meal from the night before in my stomach. Personally, I suspected the salmon in the salad or the fish entree. I carefully left the package at my seat and disembarked at Paris.

We had a scheduled layover of 50 minutes in Paris. The people in Atlanta knew that it would be tight and put special tags on our bags that indicated a quick transfer was needed. When we landed, we had to get onto a bus to go to the terminal. To go from our arrival terminal to our departure terminal, we had to take another bus. We arrived at the door to the departure terminal about 10 minutes before the scheduled departure time and our anxiety was beginning to rise. We went to the information board to learn the gate number for our flight. Instead of a gate number, we read that the flight was closed and our anxiety level rose further. We asked someone who directed us to the gate and our optimism began to grow. When we finally arrived at the gate we were told that the flight was closed and our anxiety turned to disappointment. While we attempted to get to our plane we moved through the airport at a brisk pace and Mandy was a bit tired. She sat down at the gate and was in no hurry to get up. She explained that she needed the heart medication that was now on its way to Budapest. After Mandy finished her explanation and the gate workers repeated their explanation that the gate
was closed, Mandy remained seated in the chair she now claimed as her own. She was visibly upset and the workers at the gate exchanged a number of their own concerned glances. Eventually they suggested that we inquire at the ticket counter while we still had the chance to get a replacement ticket for the next flight.

At the ticket counter, Mandy explained her story to a new person. She pointed out the 50-minute layover, described the bus trips around the terminals, complained about the early closing of the gate, explained the situation regarding her medication and expressed concern about the baggage being left unclaimed in Budapest. The very polite ticket agent responded in such a way that indicated his understanding of some of the story but that his English proficiency made it impossible for him to understand all that was communicated. He noted that the luggage was not in route but had been kept in Paris. With this tidbit of information Mandy asked if there would be any way to retrieve the baggage so that she could get her medication. The ticket agent indicated that it was possible to get the luggage but that it would have to be claimed and rechecked, which would likely be a long ordeal. In the end, Mandy decided not to worry about the medication.

We returned to the terminal area to wait the two hours before our next flight. We found a phone and notified our friends, the Southards who live in Budapest and were going to pick us up from the airport, that we missed our flight. The Charles Degaulle Airport in Paris has seating in each gate area but not in the main terminal area. There are restrooms in the main terminal area but not seats, other than those in the restrooms, which are not really for resting, after all. To make things more interesting, the security screening occurs at the individual gates and not at the main terminal entrance. With the two-hour wait, Mandy was certain that a restroom break would be involved. She wanted to sit down but did not want to go through security more than once. The compromise was to sit on the first step of a staircase for a while, make a stop at the bathroom and then go to the gate area. Once we arrived at the gate area, Mandy found a number of seats together that allowed her to lie down. She soon fell asleep until I decided to take a picture of her. Our time in Paris was quite memorable.

Finally, it was time to board the plane destined for Budapest. We walked down the hall to the plane that was waiting only to be directed into a room that looked much like the inside of a city bus. It had the same rigid seats and hand holds along the roof that are common on city buses. After the room was filled much beyond its capacity, again like a city bus, the entire room began to move. This happened about 15 minutes before the scheduled departure of the flight. The room was lowered to the point that it was at the same level as a city bus and then drove away just like a city bus. We were transported in this bus like contraption to the airplane. When we arrived at our plane, the compartment in which we were stored rose up to the level of the airplane door and we were transferred to the airplane. Of course, we were not dismissed by row number so it took longer to board the plane than normal. We now understood why the gate was closed 10 minutes before our previously scheduled flight.
About 10 minutes after the scheduled departure, the plane finally began to roll away. During the flight, they offered us sandwiches for lunch. Mandy was not eager to allow the airplane food one more chance to churn her stomach but, I decided to try one. I decided that it could not be any worse than the last meal I partook. The sandwich was quite tasty and continued through the normal digestive process in the proper direction so I labeled it a successful encounter.

We exited the plane in Budapest and proceeded to the baggage claim area. After a few minutes, the bags began to appear but only about 15 for the entire flight. Two of the 15 bags belonged to us so we were quite optimistic. After about 10 minutes another set of bags came but there were still many people without bags. After another 10 minutes yet another set of bags arrived. We were happy to notice one that looked like ours coming around the belt. As the bag was coming toward us, I notice what looked like our final bag on the way. My excitement was dashed when I saw someone else pick up the piece of luggage and head for the customs area. I hoped that the bag was his because I have had another experience when my bag was mistaken for someone else’s and they did not realize it until they reach their home. We continued to watch the baggage until all but two other people from our flight had retrieved their bags and retreated from the airport. The remaining passengers headed over to the lost luggage area with Mandy close behind. I stayed near the baggage area in case our missing suitcase mysteriously appeared. It did not. After some time, Mandy completed the paperwork with assistance from someone who spoke English as a third or fourth language. This person seemed quite able to speak Hungarian on the phone, French to a couple in front of us and German to someone in another line. Mandy and I split our clothes between two suitcases. One piece of baggage contained some supplies that we brought for the Southards and another piece contained materials that we were going to use to teach a class at a local school in Budapest. The one piece of luggage out of four that was missing contained some of our clothes and, you guessed it, Mandy’s medicine.

We were assured that the luggage was on the next flight that was scheduled to arrive at 9:00 p.m. Budapest time, which was 2.5 hours after our arrival. We were informed that the bag would be delivered to the hotel and should arrive there before 11:00.

An hour after our arrival in Budapest, we were ready to head to customs. By now, the airport was quiet and the customs agents were not interested in investigating passengers so we passed through unchecked. We connected with Marsha and Jim who had no idea what was wrong and why we were so late. They were relieved that we arrived safely.

Finding our hotel through Budapest’s maze of one-way streets was quite challenging. We got to the road listed as the address of the hotel but we realized that we were already beyond it. Since it was a one-way road we could not just turn around. We parked so that Jim could study the map. I got out of the car, found some snow, made a
snowball and hurled it at the car window. The three adults with me shook their heads at the incident. We stopped very near the Danube River where the lights of the buildings and bridges were very pretty. I took a picture of the Chain Bridge that was nearby.

After passing through a tunnel and maneuvering through a few more streets, we finally arrived at the hotel. We gave a note from the people at the airport to the person at the front desk and explained that our luggage was supposed to arrive sometime that evening. We passed the button for the elevator and waited. It did not arrive and we soon realized that we were pushing the indicator light and not the button. The button was this inconspicuous thing below the indicator light. When the elevator arrived we were faced with this small box that did not seem like it would allow four people to fit, let alone any luggage. We were able to position everything and everyone in the elevator and went to the first floor. In Europe, the first floor is not the ground floor but the first floor above the ground floor. We deposited our items in the room, which was quaint but quite acceptable. We then departed for a very pleasant meal at the Tabani Terasz restaurant.

After dinner we returned to the hotel and thanked the Southards for their assistance that evening. Mandy called at 10:15 to check on the status of the bag. She was told that the bag would arrive at the hotel that evening. At 12:20, Mandy called again to check on the status of the suitcase. She was told that it would arrive at the hotel by morning. Mandy explained her need for her medication. After bantering back and forth for a while, the gentleman at the other end said that the bag would arrive by 4:00 a.m. After further bantering the time was changed to 3:00 a.m. After a little more discussion, the person at the other end asked Mandy to find someone who spoke Hungarian because he was not able to communicate well enough with her. With that, a very disheartened Mandy decided to double some heart medicine that she had with her to offset the missing medicine that was in the suitcase. We finally got to sleep some time around 2:00 a.m. to begin our rest for the wonderful time we had planned in Hungary to celebrate our 20th wedding anniversary.

We awoke later that morning at about 8:30 a.m. We showered, discussed the missing suitcase, dressed and headed down for breakfast. When we opened the door to depart, our lovely suitcase greeted us in the hallway. We do not know how long it was there. Since we were so tired, it is quite possible that the bag had arrived earlier and that someone knocked on the door but that we slept right through the activity.

The successful rendezvous with our suitcase made our breakfast much more enjoyable. The hotel provided a complementary breakfast with the room, which included orange juice, cereal, apples, yogurt, breakfast cold cuts, sliced cheese, breads and your choice of short order eggs. Mandy chose scrambled eggs and I chose fried eggs. I like my fried eggs well done. I like the yolk to be broken and the egg flipped so that there is nothing running on my plate except for live insects. My grandfather, on the other hand, liked his eggs cooked just enough to create a thin shell over the egg but still provide for
runny egg whites. I told the cook that I wanted my eggs over hard and to break the yolk. He gave me a look that made it quite clear to me that I could have just asked for broiled lobster stuffed with lima beans and he would not have known the difference. I followed this with the words, “break yolk” and a chopping motion with my hands. I then said, “flip” and demonstrated this action with my hands.

When our eggs were delivered, my egg was sunny side up with runny egg whites and a runny yolk. My grandfather would have loved it. At least I understood the look on the cook’s face when I made my request. I looked at Mandy and informed her that I would not be able to eat the raw eggs. Although Mandy did not select this dish as her first choice, she does like runny eggs and was willing to provide for her husband by trading eggs. As the day wore on and I continued to ponder my eggstravagant dilemma, I was determined to communicate my preferred style of egg and enjoy eating the finished product.

The next morning, I made my same request and received the same look from the cook. I repeated my “break yolk” command but it did not seem to help. I stood at the counter while the cook put the egg on the griddle. He turned away from the griddle and saw me standing there. I repeated my request to break the yolk and still received the same blank stare. I thought another term might be helpful so I said, “cut” and made the motion with my hands. The cook stood there with eggsactly the same look on his face as before. I pointed at the spatula in his hand; said, “cut” and then pointed to my egg. He reached toward the egg on the griddle with the spatula and had a very confused look on his face. I repeated, “cut.” He reached closer and had the spatula positioned over the egg. He turned his head back to me with a questioning look on his face. I nodded; said, “cut” and made the motions with my hand. He cut the egg with the spatula and then looked back at me with a worried look on his face. I beamed with excitement on the successful communication of my desires with the egg yolk, nodded with encouragement and put both thumbs up to indicate his success. He grinned. Then I said, “flip” and made the motions with my hand. He had the confused look on his face again. I decided that one successful accomplishment in the day was plenty and that I still had a few days to communicate to the next step.

A few minutes later, the cook arrived with our eggs. He had a great big smile on his face as he placed my egg in front of me. He had flipped it and it was well done. Just as an added measure, he cut the egg again so that I had two halves. I guess he did not understand that I only wanted to break the yolk but I did not mind the presentation of two halves of an egg. The next morning I made the same request. This time the cook nodded with confidence, raised his hand in the air and said, “OK.” My eggs arrived eggsactly the way I wanted them, two days in a row. I provided much positive feedback and it was clear that both of us were very pleased with an eggsellent job well done.

That ends the initial dilemmas we encountered on our trip to Budapest. By now you have probably read enough and I have written enough so you will not get to read about
any of the trip at this time. I will say that up to this point, our time in Budapest has been great.