

IN MY OPINION**Caroline Porter****Notes from the hinterland**

Our trip began under a homeland security "Orange Alert" but we were lucky to be traveling through small airports — Moline, Cincinnati and Sarasota. I didn't know whether to be more afraid of terrorism or dying from flu contracted on the plane.

One guy I might have kicked off the plane in Cincinnati looked sick, drugged, menacing and was coughing. (Oh, swell.) Just for the record, he was light-skinned with American clothing.

In the Cincinnati airport I met a woman from Toronto, Canada, who had left her airport ten minutes after we had from Moline, but was there before us. Her son is a ground engineer in Afghanistan and checks for underground and other explosives. She said his and other soldiers' lives had been saved by Afghans who warned them of terrorist activities, once before they entered an old palace, which had been loaded with explosives. Afghans risk their lives to cooperate with American soldiers, she said. Many dig up bombs they find and leave them for the soldiers to pick up. Her son joined the Canadian military so he could go to Afghanistan. He is 22 years old. She is very proud of him.

While checking into our hotel, two cars parked in front, including our rental car, began to honk. It turns out the other family's three year old had activated the panic button on their car remote. My husband had activated ours. No comment.

Both the mother and I ran outside to stop the racket.

My mother is spending her first Christmas without her husband of 71 years. We are here to spend it with her, but she is sad and so are we. The mood changed as the day progressed. Ended on a good high note. We've spoken freely about my father, exchanging stories and memories.

My 95-year-old mother had an appointment to have her hair done at noon the day before Christmas. The beauty shop is in her retirement community — she says she never, ever, saw so many walkers in one place.

The news of Christmas Day is full of

violence and death all over the world and threats of more. And that includes all the murders and violence against each other in this country. Today, the day after Christmas, I think the human race is disgusting.

My teeny, tiny little mother says this morning, "Well, where are we going to eat tonight?" By this time I need a can of Slim Fast, period.

We finally hit the outside bar at this place and met some interesting people, including a couple from Scotland. She had visited the USA several times but it was his first visit. He loves the country and the people and has a great sense of humor. My husband, ever the mid-Westerner, had to ask him about the "skirts" they wear. When I asked what they would do on New Year's Eve, (after they get back to Scotland) he leaned forward to look my husband in the eye and said, "Well, I'll be wearing my skirt."

A wedding on the beach was in process, everyone in typical formal wedding dress, cascading across the sand to get to the little area of the wedding in the middle of the beach. A young woman walked by us and said with a glint in her eye, "I didn't bring my gift, did you?"

When I speculated later about the status of the wedding, the Scotsman said in his marvelous accent, "I think they've already divorced."

Next we stay next in Melbourne, Fla. with my brother-in-law, wife and family. My 82-year-old brother-in-law works at a Winn Dixie grocery store, bagging groceries and moving carts. He's had two heart by-pass surgeries and is doing just what he should — working and exercising. He sure looks cute in his Winn Dixie uniform and his wife is so happy he's occasionally out of the house.

Our trip includes visiting relatives of my former husband. We are still family even though the divorce was 28 years ago.

These are some vacation notes until we hit the frozen tundra. Best wishes for a good new year. Remember, it won't just happen. We have to work for it.

Caroline Porter is a freelance writer from Galesburg who can be reached at cporter@galesburg.net. Other columns are online at www.thezephyr.com.