

# Just Plane Helpful

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It was May, 1988. I'd just completed basic training in Great Lakes, Illinois and was taking my first-ever off-base weekend leave. We didn't get much notice about the duty schedule, maybe a week if lucky. This was a rare event: no duty for an entire weekend and I could go anywhere I wanted.

For a 19-year-old sailor who was very, very homesick, there was only one place to go.

I went to the on-base travel agency to get a plane ticket home to Raleigh, North Carolina. Cost didn't matter because I might not get this chance again for months. I got my ticket and headed for the barracks to pack my big green sea bag. I would leave the next day.

I had never traveled out of O'Hare airport in Chicago before. As a result I was sorely mistaken about the amount of time it would take to get to the airport and through the massive terminal to my plane.

As the taxi drove I got more and more nervous. I was going to miss my plane.

We arrived and I jumped out with my sea bag on my back and ran. A full-out run took me to ticketing quickly. But what a sight I must have been: a 6-foot-5-inch man in full dress blues, highly polished shoes, and a big green bag on his back running through the airport at breakneck speed.

It seemed like the gate was a full mile away! I ran, arriving at the gate only to see my plane pulling away.

Then it started. The gate agent asked if that was my plane. I breathlessly told her yes. As I stood red faced, with disbelief in my eyes, she picked up the phone. Somehow she spoke with the captain of my plane. She told him I needed to BE on that plane. Then she smiled and my heart leapt. The plane was being pulled back into the gate!

The attendant rushed me down the gangway where the airplane door opened and I boarded. Next a flight attendant put me in first class (my first time ever). She treated me like royalty -- like I always flew first class, even though I clearly did not. When she heard I was going home for Mother's Day weekend, she gave me two bottles of champagne to give my mom as a gift. I got great food and fancy drinks the whole time.

The short flight ended much too quickly, and as I deplaned I got to thank the captain, who pulled the plane back so a kid could go home to see mom on Mother's Day. Now, nearly 20 years older, I realize I really owed a thank you to the entire plane, to all the people who allowed me to delay their arrival just because I'd never experienced O'Hare before.

It was their combined kindness which allowed me to get to my first hero, my mom Vicki.

Source: [HeroicStories.com](http://HeroicStories.com)