

Not A Holiday To Remember

Contributed by Sammy Nelson

I love going home for Christmas. Actually getting there is the best part of the whole thing.

The literal methodology of arriving, however, is one I could certainly do without. I don't drive and flying is such a hassle and with the times we live in I choose to keep both feet firmly planted on the ground.

I don't care much for buses either. Cramped and crowded and filled with people you wouldn't even lend change to. I sure can't walk from Kansas to New York so the only other option was to take a train. Not all that expensive and pretty fast plus you get food and a place to sleep.

We depart the station late at night. I prefer night travel since most people will just sleep and leave you alone for a good six hours or so. I settled into a passenger car. Stored my luggage directly over my seat and made myself as comfortable as I could on what can be best described as concrete wrapped in some fabric.

As I expected the trip was pretty unexciting. People were sleeping and that's all I asked for: quiet. I fell asleep around 1 AM with my portable MP3 player sounding off in my ear.

The evening took a turn for the worse as I was awoken around 3:30 AM when the train jerked forward, throwing me unexpectedly onto the floor. The screeching of the brakes and the smell that followed is really quite awful. The explosion that came next was a pure shock. Screams were let out. Questions being yelled and the train porters lost for words and explanations.

We rushed to the windows to look to see what the hell was going on. We could see flames near the front of the train but had no knowledge until moments later when a porter rushed by. I grabbed him and asked. Startled he replied that someone was parked on the tracks and we couldn't stop in time. And we were going to be evacuating.

He ran to the exit doors and unlocked them and started to usher all of us out of the car. We gathered with other groups of passengers already left out. What we could see was a black SUV stopped on the tracks and burning up. There were passengers from the SUV standing up the road and eventually made their way down to our group.

Their car stalled while going up the small hill and it crawled to a stop on the tracks. The train was coming and they saw it. They tried to wave us down they said but it didn't help. They were just teenagers and I doubt they had the strength to push the SUV all the way across in time.

The train struck the SUV at near full speed making it catch aflame and explode. The kids had minor injuries from flying debris but no one was serious injured, as with us. Bumps, bruises and some cuts were all that the train passengers suffered.

I eventually made it home, shaken but none the worse for wear. I'm learning to drive now.