**[A Small “d” Democratic Reflection on Hurricane Irma](https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/09/22/a-small-d-democratic-reflection-on-hurricane-irma/). Mike Miller.** *CounterPunch.* **September 22, 2107.**

**Preface**

I went to Miami, Florida on Tuesday, September 5 for several meetings related to a project I’m working on. While in the air, my hosts wrote an e-mail telling me not to come.  Too late!  By the time I arrived, things were shutting down in Miami. All my meetings were cancelled. My host advised me to move my return flight to an earlier date because it was unlikely that planes would be flying on Saturday, September 9.  I did that.  On Friday, September 8, at around 1:45 p.m., I left my airport area hotel and headed for Miami International Airport with a reservation for a return flight to San Francisco departing at 9:30 p.m.

The experience at Miami International Airport was stressful. It was also instructive…on a lot of important things.

**The Story**

*Lines*

I got to the Miami International Airport far in advance of my flight of my Thursday, September 7, 9:30 pm flight.  I went to a line where I hoped I might move to an earlier flight. The people there had tickets, but also had luggage or some special circumstance—like changing your flight time.  I was hoping to move to an earlier departure.

The line moved very slowly.  The up-side of the down was a chance to observe and talk with people.  A young woman in front of me, and a 60ish woman behind me were my conversation companions.  The young woman had her dog in a kennel, and a couple of over-sized suitcases.  “I took everything I really care about.  I think my apartment is going to be flooded,” she told us.  She was pretty philosophical about it:  “things can be replaced; your life can’t.”

The woman behind us was scheduled to leave for London on a 7:30 pm flight.  When we moved only a few yards in a line that looked like it was a mile long, she got concerned and asked if we would let her move in front of us.  No problem; by that time we were travel buddies.  I watched her inch her way toward the front of the line, no doubt repeating her London departure time concern.  She was quickly at the front.  Lots of people said, “no problem,” and they weren’t her travel buddies.

After barely moving for an hour-and-a-half, gave up.  I punched my confirmation number into one of the computer terminals and I had a boarding pass…to go no place as things turned out.

Like all the other lines in the airport, the security line was long.  At least it moved more quickly than the initial line I’d been waiting in.  Once through security, I head down the very long Miami Airport corridors to my gate.

*Dogs*

Lots of people were in the airport with their dogs.  Most of them were quiet and friendly.  The larger ones were already in kennels, but they were let out and held on a leash because everything was moving so slowly.  If you’re traveling with a dog, and the dog is fairly small, it’s now relatively easy to take it on a plane with you.  Pouch sits on your lap, and you hope the passenger next to you isn’t allergic.

There were also some barkers, and some shitters too. You’d be amazed that owners of some of the shitters just left their piles.  So who looks for dog shit when you’re walking down the hallways of an airport looking for your gate?  Yeh, you got it, people stepped in it and dragged it around.  And the custodial staff evidently had other priorities.

*On Board…and Not*

Once on my plane, we sat or rolled on the tarmac for almost three hours. Then, in order to avoid paying each of the passengers a big fine, the pilot returned to the gate and we were told to get off.  (The fine is the result of a horrendous incident a number of years ago when passengers sat on a plane for hours, and the airline wouldn’t let them off.  Now the Passenger Bill of Rights says airlines can’t do that.  Too bad; there should be some flexibility.  I think at some point we might have been able to fly, but rules prevented it.

In addition to that problem, there were back-up problems with air control—they were on skeleton crew status because some of the controllers had earlier been sent home.  There were also crew problems with maximum number of hours allowed in the air before a crew change is required.  We also had a generous pilot who decided to wait for four passengers who were someplace in the airport but “on their way”.  We might have been able to take off had we not waited for them.

After returning to the gate, a small number of us left the plane.  The remaining passengers staged a plane-in (a distant cousin of the 1960s sit-ins) and refused to get off.  While they stayed, we wandered back and forth between the gate and the American Airlines Customer Service counter trying to find a way to depart.  The counter personnel were overwhelmed.  There were two of them!  Nobody got anything from their wait in line because by that time all flights almost anyplace had reached their maximum 50 stand-by passengers.  Whoops.  Forgot.  I could have gotten on a plane to Santiago, Chile if I’d had my passport.  Oh well; another time.

*More Lines*

A little bit of everything comes out of people when they are frustrated in line.  We had our cursers:  “What the f..k are you all doing; I’m going to sue the shit out of American Airlines…”  You get the picture.  Then there are the thoughtful people: sharing a blanket with a little kid; offering to go to a restaurant and get food; generally trying to be helpful.  We had a couple of comics too.  Sorry, I can’t recall any of the jokes.  Most people were just frustrated.  That’s the group I was in.

The check-in counter agents must have called the cops because of the rowdiness of a few passengers in the line. Several deputy sheriffs showed up…just in case.

The American Airlines people on the ground were totally unprepared to deal with what was going on. Later in the day, someone bought snacks and brought pillows to the customer service counter area.  Luckily for me, from who-knows-where, some wooden rocking chairs were brought out to the gates and the service counter area. They had high backs, so were much more comfortable than those low-back row-seats that you no longer can sleep on because there are arm rests between each seat.  But the comfort didn’t last long; the hard wood and my butt parted company after an hour.

It finally became clear around 3:00 in the morning that none of us would go anyplace.  So I found an energy source, plugged in my computer power chord, and caught up on correspondence and project I’m working on.

*What’s Next?*

The last thing I remember before falling asleep is an announcement telling us “you can’t stay at the airport; buses are going to arrive around 3:00 or 4:00 p.m. today to take you to shelters.” My inclination was to hide out in a men’s room, wait for the busses to leave, then find a seat in the empty airport. I thought I’d rather be there than in a gymnasium with several hundred other people, their dogs, their farts and burps, germs, etc.  Didn’t know if I could pull that off, but it was my plan.  My main concern was not getting one of my chest colds that knock me out for 10 days.  I can put up with everything else.

I awoke from my six-and-a-half hours of sleep on Friday, September 8, at about 12:30 p.m.  Still a bit groggy, I headed for what looked to be the most comfortable restaurant that was still open.  That was the Irish Pub where my Irish omelet was perfect.  Given my plan to remain in the airport for the duration of my stay in Miami, I thought this was a good place to start:  comfortable seats, CNN TV, good food, good service.  One of the waiters even scoured the restaurant to find an electric power outlet so I could plug in and restore my computer battery.  He even looked behind the TV screens.  No luck.  Oh well.

But around 2:00, it was clear they were shutting down.  “Can I hang around here?” I asked. “No, sir, we’re closing” “I’ve got no place to go.”  “What?  You don’t have a place to stay, and you don’t have a fight?” “No, neither one.”  “Let me ask.”  That was a combination of my waiter and the manager, both of whom are Latinos who talked with one another in Spanish that was too rapid for me to do more than catch a word here-and-there.

The manager checked with his boss, also in Spanish.  “Sorry, sir, but you can’t stay.  But let me see if I can make you some sandwiches.”  That was encouraging. I figured my safari in the desert of Miami Airport might be well served with an occasional bite to eat.  No deal.  “The kitchen is closed.”

Down the hallway from Gate D-37 where customer service is located there was still a Hudson News store open with various packaged goodies. I stocked up:  two healthy packages, and my sweet tooth won out on the third.

“What the heck”, said I to myself, “I’m going back to American Airlines (AA) customer service. Maybe something is breaking there.”  Now, instead of last night’s crew of two counter staff, there were eight.  And the line was shorter.  When I got to the counter, lo and behold there was one last flight to Dallas, and there were seats on it and a decent connecting flight to San Francisco.  Turns out AA made a decision to put passengers on the flight that was taking their remaining staff out of Miami Airport.  So, believe it or not, I got a ticket on a plane with a number of pilots, flight attendants, ground crew, who knows who else from American, and a lucky umber of “civilian” passengers.  Further believe it or not:  there are at least a dozen empty seats on the plane.  The decision must have been made at the last minute to let passengers aboard, and there weren’t that many of us left in the airport—at least at the customer service counter.

*Back On A Plane*

By 3:30 pm, I was on the plane.  But I was now leery; I’d been on a plane earlier:  “Don’t count your chickens before they’re hatched,” says I to myself.  To make matters more suspenseful, there were a couple of false starts:  first, the doors were shut—you know the message, “attendants lock your doors and prepare for departure” (or something like that). They did, and they were belted in their seats when they got up and opened the doors. More passengers. Breathe a sigh of relief:  people getting on is good; people getting off is bad!  More waiting.  Pilot announcements that explain:  “due to the skeleton air control crew, planes are spaced with 20 miles between them.”  Then, “the plane to your left isn’t leaving because it’s too large.  But we’re o.k.”  Whew! Who knows what “too large” has to do with departures, but I’m glad we’re small.

We took off in an easterly direction, banked to the south, then headed west.  The sky was beautiful.  Puffy cumulus clouds looked like marshmallows stacked in the sky.  Below, an archipelago:  I didn’t realize there were so many small islands of the coast of Florida.  Miami is bathed in sun. Skyscrapers line the east coast, and there’s a lot of water in Miami itself. Who knows what it’s going to look like in 24 hours.

*Heading down to Dallas*

The pilot just announced arrival in ten minutes at Dallas.  I’m packing up my computer.  I’m tired.  But believe it or not, it’s been a great trip.

**People**

*“Me First” people*

At the gate where we got kicked off our September 7, 9:30 pm scheduled San Francisco departure flight, there were American Airlines (AA) attendants answering questions from people in their order in the line.  Some people thought they deserved special treatment:  they looked young and healthy to me, so neither age nor illness appeared to be an issue.  But there they were pushing their way to the front.  The AA people were firm:  “we’re talking with people in the order they are in line.”  One guy wouldn’t take no for an answer:  he went to the other counter agent’s line, and pushed himself forward there.  Same answer.  A different answer might have precipitated a riot; I would have been a rioter!  Same thing happened when the sheriff’s deputies arrived—the “me first” people trying to get ahead of the line.

*The Cops*

The five deputy sheriffs who showed up at our gate to make sure things didn’t get out of hand were interesting:  three white guys and two black women.  One of the white guys and one of the black women acted “tough cop”; the other black women was a humorist and actually fun to be around. (She’s one year from retirement, and looking forward to traveling, she told me.  I asked her if she was in a union… “yes” … “which one”… “PBA” (Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association) …”what kind of pension plan do you have?”… “a good one:  75% of my best paid five years.”)  One of the remaining white guys was a social worker:  he really was helping people as best he could with not much more information available to him than any of us heathen passengers had.  The last guy was the strong silent type.  Just stood there looking kind of ominous with his arms crossed most of the time.

*I’m my brother’s and sister’s keeper people*

This was told to me by one of the women in today’s line, about her experience in the same line yesterday.  An older man was desperately looking for his Alzheimer-ill wife who had wandered off while he was dealing with a ticket agent.  A scouting party was pulled together, but turned out not to be needed.  A young man encountered her at a gate where he had just won the lotto (a drawing of the few available seats for the 50-per-plane standby travelers.  (Some people scheduled to be on planes couldn’t get to the airport or for some other reason were staying in Miami). He brought the missing-wife with him to the customer service counter.  Somehow it turned out that if he sacrificed his ticket, the couple could get on a flight.  I never did figure out how that worked, and maybe it was an airport legend already being born, or I got the details wrong. Anyway, it was a nice feel-good story.

My hat created a brother’s keeper story as well:  “Sir,” said one of my fellow Gate 37 line members, “you left your hat hanging on the rocking chair.”  “Would you watch my suitcase for me?”  “Of course.”  I quickly returned to the counter area, got my hat and went back to the gate.

I had my own feel-good story:  after two hours in yesterday’s line, my 80-year old feet didn’t want to stand any more.  I asked the young lady with the dog if she’d move my suitcase along while I found a place to sit for a while.  “Of course,” she replied.

*Strong Suits Come Out*

In addition to the two people at the counter last night, AA had a roving agent who moved down the line to answer “quick questions”.  Nobody had any of those, they all wanted his time.  This guy was extraordinary, and obviously fit for his assignment.  No story was too insignificant for his sympathy.  No detail was too small for his attention.  No complaint seemed without merit.  And no matter what the story, the answer turned out to be the same:  “There are no more seats; every plane has a wait-list; you won’t get any flight out of Dallas before Monday.  Go to a shelter.”  All said calmly and with a smile.  He was made for the job.

There were lots of people like that:  flight attendants, ground crew, counter personnel, waiters and waitresses, hotel staff.  A lot of people helped make the best of a bad situation.

Today’s line at Customer Service (“Gate D-37” is now indelibly imprinted in my mind) was a totally different story from yesterday’s chaos, frustration and anger.  One of the people in the line told me that there was a near-riot here late last night because of the snail’s pace of the line, due to the presence of only two agents at the counter.  Today there were eight. And there were fewer people in line.  And, lo and behold, when I got to the counter there was a seat—the one I’m now sitting in as we head to Dallas.

**Meanings**

*Be persistent.  Be skeptical.  Hope for luck.*

Had I not returned to the customer service line for a fourth try, I would never have gotten on this flight.  Beside my general ornery character trait that arises in these circumstances, I thought about institutional dynamics.  AA didn’t want a repeat of the scandal in Chicago when a United staffer dragged a doctor, who turned out to be Chinese which added the dimension of race, from a plane—all on living cell phone video!  Not very good for the bottom line!  My thinking about that bottom line told me that by today the AA higher-ups who thought about profits and had a longer term view would have passed the word down:  no egg on our faces!  I think that’s why there were so many extra people at the ticket counter today, even with far fewer people in the line.

And I had a little bit of luck!

*Race*

In the line today, I was between two Jamaican women who let me in their conversation.  The younger of them was traveling with her older aunt who came to Miami for some medical treatment.  Now they were having difficulty getting home. The older one was “going home” after a number of years living in either Georgia or Florida.  “At home,” she said, “you can go anyplace on a bus or a jitney or in an inexpensive taxi or by foot.  Here, everything is so far apart and it’s so hard to get from one place to another.” And the pace of life was better at home; and the people were friendlier.

As the conversation went on, the older woman said, “Do you notice:  almost all the people in the line are of darker skin; you don’t see fair-skinned people here.”  “I’m pretty pale-faced,” I piped in.  “I didn’t mean you,” she said.  The younger one was skeptical.  So was I.  Then I looked at the line:  of the 30-or-so people in it, I would estimate that at least 80% of them were black.  Could this be?  I still doubt it. But in today’s world, I could believe it, and surely I can understand how a black person would believe it.

W.E.B. DuBois had it right: “…the world problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line…” Add the 21st. And don’t forget:  he thought class was important too. Were he alive today, he’d add gender.

**Analysis**

*Crippled programs syndrome*

When I worked as lead organizer for San Francisco’s Mission Coalition Organization in the late 1960s, our volunteer lawyer in our dealings with the Federal Government developed the “crippled programs syndrome” concept.  It applied to the inadequacies of federal programs that were underfunded, constrained by limiting guidelines, and legislatively designed so they wouldn’t compete with the private sector.  Then, when beneficiaries and the broader public complained about the programs, the conservative, anti-government crowd used the program inadequacies to argue that government doesn’t work. Remember Ronald Reagan’s, “government is not the solution; it is the problem”?

Applied to the airport situation, I found some parallels:

+ TSA—the security agency—has a mandate to prevent terrorism. That, of course, is why we have to go through those horrible lines and screens before we get to our flight gate. Applied to this situation, TSA would not allow baggage that was already stowed to be removed and transferred to other planes via their owners without another screening. That made transfers for checked-luggage people impossible.

+ Flight control was on skeleton-crew status because air controllers had earlier been sent home. That meant a slow-down for departures that, in turn, meant planes that might have flown couldn’t get to the tarmac, and the earlier flight I was on couldn’t take off!

+ The passenger bill of rights was adopted by Congress because of an horrific incident some years back in which a plane full of travelers sat on a runway for hours before it finally either took off or discharged those on board (I don’t remember which). The result was an outcry from travelers that led to a provision that says an airline is liable for a fine of $35K per traveler if the plane holds you on board for three or more hours without departing. At least that’s what our pilot told us. So, of course, as the three-hour mark approached, the airline had an interest in getting us off the plane if it couldn’t get us in the air.

Union contracts stipulate maximum hours for pilots to be in the cockpit—for very good safety reasons. Maybe the provision is also in flight attendant agreements as well—I don’t know. That turned out to be another reason for our plane heading back to the gate.  “If we don’t leave in four minutes,” our pilot informed us, “we have to take you back to the gate because of contract provisions. We will have to be in the air too long.”  “Give them an inch, and they’ll take a mile,” is the standard trade unionist’s response to a query about “a little flexibility”.  There’s good reason for the argument.

Add all this together, and you get the mess we had at the Miami Airport—a mess that would have been much worse had it not been for the spontaneous organization that took place among the people most adversely affected by what was going on.  Is there a better way?

*The Airport Became a Community*

Trapped in the airport with nothing to do but deal with airlines and stress, and talk with others who were in the same boat as, you created a community—a group of people who shared intense and meaningful experiences, and who knew their interests were in some way connected with each other.

In this community, boundaries created by race, class, language, nationality or anything else other than common plight faded into the background, opening space for relationships.  Further, there were no hierarchies providing rules, regulations, guidelines, precedents or customs to tell us what we ought to do.

Stress combined with an absence of rules to specifically define a situation brings out the best and worst in people.  I saw dozens of airport workers stretch to make things work for beleaguered passengers:  the waiter and manager at the Irish Pub did all they could to make me comfortable and get food to me for what I thought might be a several-day stay in the airport; for the most part counter people were infinitely patient with some customers who actually yelled at them, and all the passengers who were desperate for a way to fly when there wasn’t one; the pilot of my flight left his cockpit, came back to the economy section, and invited a man with his young son to take a look-see in the cockpit as we waited for stragglers to board the plane; a flight attendant who could have been home volunteered to work the shift to make things easier on passengers and fellow staffers; an electric jitney driver re-configured the luggage he was carrying so I could squeeze on his cart for the extra-long trip from one “D” gate to another.  (Dallas Airport doesn’t have moving walkways; there’s a skyway that operates overhead, but I wasn’t sure it was working so walked most of the time.)

The inventiveness, ingenuity, generosity and cooperation witnessed in the airport was partially possible because people were working outside their normal “rulebooks”.  Relationships were peer-to-peer, horizontal in character rather than the typical hierarchy of status and power that governs most institutions, and that is governed by detailed rules.  Could there be lessons here for a better way to organize things in society-at-large?

Imagine the airport and airlines organized according to different principles and in different structures.

First of all, workers, travelers, managers, airline hub communities, and other stakeholders would own airlines and their support services with widely shared stocks.  That way the people who are on the ground interacting with travelers would be the ones making decisions—not a distant management interested in CEO salaries or absentee stockholders interested in the maximization of profits.

Second, everybody would be organized:  customers, workers, communities.  They would all have the capacity to act on their particular interests so that the general interest/common welfare didn’t end up screwing anybody.  Results are negotiated, not imposed.

Third, site structures would have a great deal of autonomy to deal with both routine and extraordinary circumstances.  Granted the exceptions noted above and yesterday, the overall impression I had was of workers who wanted to serve and do a good job, and travelers who were generous in spirit and caring about others who might be facing special circumstances that required special attention.  The older Jamaican lady in today’s line put it clearly:  there should be recognition of special circumstances like age, health, necessity of getting to one’s destination for important work or health reasons, and so on.  Lots of wisdom in that idea, but it implies trust in good will rather than reliance on rules.  It implies a basic decency on the part of people if they don’t think they’re being suckers.  If they had authority, I think those with good will would impose their wisdom on the “Me-First” people.  Bullies shrink when faced with opposition that is bigger than they are.

One size fits all justice is better than the arbitrary and capricious behavior of a king, boss, landlord, administrator or anyone else who isn’t accountable to the people affected by the decisions.  But not all people are in the same circumstance, and justice based on core principles but with flexibility to take into account mercy and individual circumstance might be even better.

*Lord of the Flies?*

When I was an undergraduate major in political science, we read William Golding’s novel *Lord of the Flies.*  A group of British youngsters, probably sixth graders, was stranded on an isolated island. They organized themselves for self-governance. It quickly declined into chaos.  Authority was turned over to a dictator.

The book draws its philosophical premises from Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, in which life is “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.”  There is a “warre of every man against every man…every man is Enemy of every man…” In this circumstance, men give up their freedom to be ruled by a monarch who imposes order on the disorderly.  Hobbes is a major philosopher in the history of conservatism.

I have a different view.  My experience at Miami International Airport confirms it.  Most people behave toward one another with decency and generosity when they think that’s the rule of the day.  Only when they think that’s the way suckers behave do they resort to “me first.”

**Hegemony?**

This is a “sidebar” to people who think most people are selfish, and think the country’s politics reflects their attitudes.  It is commonplace among people seeking transformational social change to ascribe their failures to “hegemony”.  Often citing Antonio Gramsci’s prison writings on the subject, they argue that the dominant system rules not only, or even predominantly, through its control of political and economic institutions, but primarily because it convinces the very people it exploits to consent to their subordination.

According to this logic, the reason this or that cause is defeated is because people are “brainwashed” and believe in the dominant culture’s myths of rugged individualism:  “me first”, “watch out for numero uno”, keep up with the Jones, you are what you consume, and a related set of pacifying ideas, “you can’t fight city hall”, “the system is too powerful to fight,” “one politician is no different from another”… Ideology in this case serves as a rationale for defeat:  you don’t have to analyze your strategy and tactics, because you know in advance that you can’t win.

Experience in the airport community that was my home for two days suggests something different:  a majority of people believes they are their sister’s and brother’s keepers.  Or, in secular terms, that there is a common good for which they have some responsibility.  In the absence of opportunities to effectively act to further these values, most people set them aside.  In what they see as the mainstream, the people who do act on them are saints, martyrs or suckers.  The people in the long, slow line I first waited on let the London-headed woman ahead of them because they had a responsibility to do the right thing by her, *and they were in a context—the airport community—that supported this action*.  The people who did a variety of little things to help others, things that often involved going beyond watching out for numero uno, were similarly acting for something larger than themselves.

The support people provided, and are continuing to provide, for one another isn’t a secret either.  CNN and the PBS News Hour are filled with stories of people coming together to act in solidarity with one another.

The roots of these actions lie in the country’s small “d” democratic heritage, and the teachings of the world’s great religions that are shared by most Americans, whether born here, in Europe, in Africa, in Latin America or in the Middle East. I don’t know enough about Asian religious/cultural teachings in these areas, but I suspect these values are to be found there as well.

In most settings the opportunities to act in the ways the airport community acted don’t exist.  You can be a volunteer in a soup kitchen or as a docent in a museum, and you can give money to charities that assist the unfortunate, but the principal activities of your life have to do with securing the well-being of you and your family.

**Replicate The Airport!**

The challenge of our time is larger than any specific issue, no matter what its merits.  If we cannot substitute community based on the values supported by the people in the airport, we will be in a continuing defensive battle against profiteers and power aggrandizers who define the world as a survival of the fittest and operate accordingly.

What follows?  To replicate what happened in the airport requires a renewal of the civil society voluntary associations that are the bearers of these values—churches, temples, synagogues, mosques and other communities of faith; unions; interest and identity groups.  By renewal I mean the transformation of these organizations into places of ongoing participation by the members as distinct from places in which nominal members leave the work of the organization to a handful of paid leaders and staff and their coterie of volunteers.

To replicate what happened in the airport requires multi-issue organizations.  As African-American poet and feminist Audre Lord put it in “Learning from the 60s”, an address at Harvard, “There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.”

To replicate what happened in the airport demands continuing activity, not ad hoc demonstrations after which most people go home and resume their private lives; shared reflection on the meaning of what’s being done; internal member/participant education that places action in the continuing contest between the haves who want to keep and the have nots and have-a-little who want change, and; celebration that creates new heroes among everyday people and a new story of history being made by us as well as “big names”.  That’s the organizing challenge for our time.  If this challenge is met, the Donald Trumps of the country will fade into the dustbin of history.

**Postscript**.

As my flight was descending into the Dallas Airport, I opened *American Way*, the AA flight magazine.  There I found “The people of Gander opened their homes to complete strangers,” by pilot Beverly Bass who on 9/11 (the infamous one) flew her re-routed plane into this small Newfoundland village.  She writes,

All told, about 7,000 passengers on the small Canadian town, nearly doubling its population…[T]he people on the ground were phenomenal  They delivered everything you could imagine throughout the night to the planes—diapers, formula, nicotine patches. They even filled 2,000 prescriptions for people who had packed their medicine in their checked bags.

When we got off the planes the next morning, tables of food lined the airport.  The residents had stayed up all night cooking for us…Gander treated us like family, opening their homes and hearts. The flight crews stayed at hotels and schools, while the town converted churches and gyms into shelters for the passengers.  When those filled, the people opened their homes to complete strangers and prepared thousands of meals for their guests.

It’s now about 11:00. As luck would have it, my Dallas-SFO flight is delayed by more than an hour.  I’m really running out of gas. I know I’ll sleep on the plane.

***Mike Miller****was a leader in the pre-1960s birth of the student movement at UC Berkeley, a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee field secretary, and director of a Saul Alinsky community organizing project. He taught community organizing at UC Berkeley, Stanford, Notre Dame, Lone Mountain, San Francisco State, University of Wisconsin/ Milwaukee, and Hayward State, and has written extensively in the field, including the recent*People Power:  The Community Organizing Tradition of Saul Alinsky*.  He directs ORGANIZE Training Center:*[*www.organizetrainingcenter.org*](http://www.organizetrainingcenter.org/)