

S6E5-JenniferElder

SPEAKERS

Peter Margaritis, Jennifer Elder

Peter Margaritis

Hey, welcome back, everybody. I have to start laughing right now. My guest today is my dear friend, Jennifer Elder. And we've known each other for, we'll just go many, many, many years. We remember when we met, but Jennifer as you heard in the bio, is a professional speaker, a CPA. She's on the speaking circuit, has traveled internationally for years, and I've kind of gotten a little bit off the road, but I still travel a little bit. And I just wanted to do something fun. And I don't want to upset any travel gods or anything like that. But I asked her if she would come on the podcast, and we can talk about the good, the bad, and oh, dear Lord, travel expenses, experiences, and sometimes expenses too, when the client goes, oh dear lord.

Jennifer Elder

Sometimes those experiences are very expensive.

Peter Margaritis

Exactly. So first and foremost, Jennifer, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to have this conversation with me.

Jennifer Elder

Always a pleasure, Peter.

Peter Margaritis

So, if I asked you, what was the most memorable good experience you've ever had traveling? What would you say to that?

Jennifer Elder

Oh, so many ways to go with that answer. I'll share a funny story first. Okay. So, we don't upset the travel gods. I'll take the hit on this one. So, I was traveling to Atlanta and I'm going to check into a hotel. They have my reservation. That's lovely. I tell them my, you know, the rewards number. That obviously pulls up my history. And while they're checking me in, they say, "Have you ever stayed with us before?" "No, I don't get to Atlanta very often." And that was this pause, that pregnant pause. And I'm like, "Oh, dear, is there a problem?" And she said, "Well, there may be a problem with your memory. You were with us last year." I said, "Okay, your records are much better than my blonde brain." And then when she gave me my key, and I walked around the corner, and I looked at the elevators, I said, "Oh, now I remember."

Peter Margaritis

So, let me ask you this question. Were you checking in, in the evening, or was this morning, the afternoon?

Jennifer Elder

This was in the evening. I was late. I was tired. And when you travel a lot, you really, unless you've had a memorable experience, you really just it's another hotel. It's another room.

Peter Margaritis

And along those lines, have you ever tried to put your key into the door of another room that was the room number of the last place you stayed at or a couple times before?

Jennifer Elder

Absolutely. And I have gone back down to the front desk saying my key doesn't work?

Peter Margaritis

Oh.

Jennifer Elder

That's typically when I'm staying in a hotel for, say two nights because I don't always carry the card sleeve with me. It says what room I'm in. So, you know, you go to the front desk and say, "My keys not working." And they say, "What room you're in," and I say, "316." And the, and they say, "What's your name?" And then they said, "Well, that's because Mrs. Elder, you're not in room 316. You're in 522."

Peter Margaritis

And I can imagine in the back of their mind they're going, should we do a sobriety test on Mrs. Elder?

Jennifer Elder

Yes, exactly! Oh, and I can share another embarrassing moment for you. Another late travel. I was tired. I ordered room service. And it was late, so, you know, I'm eating dinner at like 10:30 at night. So, I'm exhausted when dinner's over. I change into my night shirt, and I go to put the tray outside the door. And I realized what's happening just as I hear click. The door shuts behind me. I'm in my night shirt. And that's it. So, I have to go down to the front desk and ask for another key. When I checked in, the place was empty. When you go down to the Front Desk at 10:30-10:45 at night and you're only wearing a nice shirt, there are 2 million people down there. Looking at me, like I have two heads. And the poor person behind the desk is just trying to check in as many people as possible. So, they're not looking up. I finally get up there and I say, "I'm sorry. I need another key to my room." And he says, "Okay, I'll need to see some ID." I looked at him and I said, "And where do you think I can hide ID on me right now." And then he looked up and he went, "Oh dear, I'm so sorry." It was one of those desks that is actually low. So, he could see that I'm holding my night shirt down. Because I told I won't share my firstborn getting with you. Ask me 122 questions, I'll answer them. But please give me a key.

Peter Margaritis

That has almost happened to me at times. But hasn't and I just jinxed myself by making that comment.

Jennifer Elder

Exactly.

Peter Margaritis

I had an experience. I was doing some work in Iowa. And the flight was delayed. Flight was late. I got there late. Got to the hotel and they were oversold. But I have a reservation. Yes, you do Mr. Margaritis. But we were oversold, and everybody is here. And we have no more rooms. So, I thought for a moment. Do I just lose my noodle? No, I'm too tired. And actually, that's not going to get me anywhere. So, I was very, I said, Okay, I understand. So, how are we going to fix this? So, he comes back and he says we've got you booked at this one hotel. We'll get you, if you can wait for the van, we'll have the van take you. And I looked at him and went, oh, well, this hotel is not going to be somewhat of a downgrade at this point like midnight. And I had to be up at five o'clock. So, I was kind and I asked the guy said by the way, can I have a water? He goes, have two. Go get yourself some water. So, apparently, because I was so nice with this guy, and the van was running late. By the time the van got there, though, actually, the van didn't get there. He comes out with another slip as you go into this hotel. Give me that one back. And it was one of these boutique hotels. That would have been really nice if I got there like at nine o'clock at night, eight o'clock at night, but I think I pulled in and it was like 1:30 in the morning. All I just wanted to do is fall and actually I just went boom right on the bed. I was out. Never got to really enjoy it. But I guess it was a lot better than the other alternative.

Jennifer Elder

Yes, well, for your listeners, you just made one of the most important points about travel. No matter what happens, do not lose it at the people that you need help from. The number of times I hear people screaming at the airport at a gate agent. There's nothing they can do. It's not their, they're not the ones who canceled your flight. They are not the ones who caused 18 inches of snow, not their fault. And when you need somebody's help, the best way to get their help is to be nice. I can, there was a time where I was flying out of Norfolk in Virginia. And never having been to Norfolk before, I had no earthly idea that a small area would have that much traffic. So, what should have taken 15 minutes to get to the airport, took an hour, which meant I'm walking through the front door of the airport just in time. Just about witness my flight taking off. Not even close to getting to the gate. So, I go up to the check-in counter. And I, the first thing I say, "I'm an idiot. This is on me. I screwed up. I should have allowed more time and I didn't so I just missed my flight. And since I'm an idiot, can I give you some chocolate?" So, I gave the woman a bar of chocolate. I carry extra chocolate with me. And she says, "Okay, where are you trying to go?" I was not trying to go very far. It's just from Norfolk to Baltimore. I probably could have driven faster. But she's still starts typing. Hmm. Types again. Hmm. And I'm sitting there going, this is not good. The third time I hear, mmmm, it's like, I'm not getting home tonight am I or I'm driving? One of the two. And then she says, "Can you wait for a minute." She walks away. And she comes back and there's somebody else with her. And she types again and then the other woman leans over and does something. And then she hands me a ticket. And she said, "If you go to the gate right now, your flight will be leaving in about 20 minutes." I said, "You're a miracle worker. Thank you." And I looked down at that ticket and it was first class. And I said you know, there's, "You've made me, upgraded made a first class." She said, "Yes. Nobody's ever given me chocolate before. They usually yell at me

and they explain it's somebody else's fault that they're late. You owned up to it, and you were nice to me, and you gave me something."

Peter Margaritis

It's amazing.

Jennifer Elder

It's not, not yelling at somebody is key. But if you can take it to that next level and be go above and beyond. So, a dear friend of ours, Carl Alrichs, typically carries or buys at the airport, a bag of almonds or mix nuts, and hands them to the flight attendant as he gets on the plane. It's always a surprise. And they'll tell you the number of times he's gotten free cocktails.

Peter Margaritis

Yes, he has shared. He has shared that story. He also shared the story with me of, for men, wear a sport coat or jacket on the plane because nobody, especially if anyone on the plane, but especially if you're a first class because nobody does it anymore and you tend to get special. Which happened to me once, where I would, "Mr. Margaritis, would you like anything before we take off?" "Yeah, I'd like a Woodford." And the flight attendant came out. And normally you would get about maybe two fingers in the glass. You know, high. He filled it to the top. And I went, "Thank you for the sleeping pill. This is very nice of you because I rarely sleep on airplanes." And I had to finish it before we took off. And well, you know me, I finished it. And I had such a nice nap all the way to wherever the hell I was going.

Jennifer Elder

Yeah, it's amazing. You know, it's, it is true. You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. But it amazes me the number of times people just they take their frustration out. And trust me, if you travel enough, you're going to run into frustration. I was. So, I'm not going to name the airline. I will name the airport, Philadelphia. Got a connection, two flights, same airline. We know we're coming in late. There was somebody from the airline right at the end of the jet bridge telling you what gate to go to. So, I made the assumption, and obviously that's my first mistake, what happens when you assume That if you're telling me what gate, you know, I'm going to that means I've got time to get there. No. I have been known to run through the airport. So um, when I know there's a tight connection, I am not dawdling. I am not stopping to pick up a Starbucks or Dunkin Donuts, which is I went right from there to the gate. And with about 10 feet to go to hand my ticket to the gate agent, they shut the door. They saw me coming. And they shut the door anyway. And I am about to lose it because I do know that was the last flight. I am not going anywhere. I'm stuck in Philly. And it took every ounce of self control not to scream bloody murder.

Peter Margaritis

Right. Yeah.

Jennifer Elder

And not screaming in this case didn't get me anything. And did not they did not open up the door for me. I tried. I asked to speak to a manager. You know, let me speak to the person above you. I understand. And here's another hint when someone is not giving you what you want. Don't assume

they're trying to be difficult with you. One of the hints somebody gave me years ago is to say, "I know you'd help me if you could. But I understand that your hands are tied. Can I talk to somebody who has the power to approve my request." That did allow me to speak to the official manager. Still didn't give me the right answer. But it's still better than screaming at somebody. And in this day and age now, you can get blacklisted from an airline for screaming at somebody.

Peter Margaritis

Right.

Jennifer Elder

It's not worth the risk.

Peter Margaritis

The other I've done before is if there's, so the plane gets diverted or whatever, and there's a line and then you get to one person male female. Do you know who I am? And just raising a ruckus at the ticket counter. So, I'm just where that person has gone and there's a couple other people and I looked at the gate agent and said, "You know what? That man or woman who was yelling at you, do you know who he was? I didn't know who it was either." And they just started laughing. He says, "Thank you that just made my day." And back in the, when, it was the Southwest flight because I got free drink coupons from that one from her. Like here take these, you just made me laugh versus yelling at me because beyond their control. So, you know, always trying to get status on an airplane. Status at a hotel. And there were some years that I got status as a diamond medallion for Delta. Coming back from, oh where were we? Charleston, South Carolina. Flight was late. I, I get upgraded to first. I get off the plane and there is this person out there holding my name. "That's me." He goes, "Follow me." We didn't go up the jet bridge. We went out the stairs down to this Lexus. This Lexus drives all the way over to the other gate. And it's in Atlanta. And I go up and they hadn't boarded the plane yet. So, he says, "Stay here." So, he goes walking up the jetway. The doors open. And people could see me down there, and he's talking to the gate agent. And he comes back and he says, "Okay, you're on. Go ahead and sit down." And people go, "Is that a celebrity? Who is that person? How do you, how did that happen?" And I had almost every eye going past me going. Kinda looks like Robert Goulet. Maybe? Or I've heard people say that. Sometimes they go, are you the guy from Friends? I just sat there and smiled the whole time. That was that was probably the most plush service I've ever had on an airline.

Jennifer Elder

Yeah. Uh huh. Yeah, I've had that happen once. It was Air France. Where connecting flight and they actually held the plane. So, I was the last person to board the flight. But apparently because I had, again, a mention I carry chocolate with me. I give chocolate to the flight attendants as well. Typically walk on the plane and say, "How do you feel about chocolate?" Nobody ever says, "I hate it." Yeah. Well, hand them chocolate, like a sleeve of mini chocolate bars. Well, apparently, word gets around. And with my Air France connection, someone from my first flight called over to the other flight. So again, dashing through the airport, dragging my suitcase because never ever do I check a bag. Rushing up to the plane. And the flight attendant is actually standing on the jet bridge and says "Mrs. Elder?" "Wait, what?" My mother-in-law behind me? "Yes." She said, "We've been waiting for you." "I'm sorry." "No, you're good. Relax." I'm like, what planet am I on? And she hands me a different ticket

upgraded to first class again. I sit down. One flight attendant is shutting the door to the plane. And another flight attendant is coming over and saying, "What cocktail would you prefer?" It's like, this is heaven.

Peter Margaritis

Absolutely. Now Has this ever happened to you? This happened to me recently, within the last couple years, where I go and check into a hotel. And they give me my key. Actually, this just happened. This happened in November. And they give me my key. I go up to the room I stick the key in the door, I walk it and it's pitch dark, and the beds of mess. And I don't know if I just walked in on somebody or what? And that's happened two or three times. And I go back down to the front desk, I went, "This room is not, is occupied because or not I don't know. But the curtains were drawn. The place was a mess. I would prefer you give me another room. And they're so over apologetic, and then they get on the, "Yeah. Housekeeping? Could you check 406 to see if they're still there?" And they call back like, "No, they've left. We just haven't gotten to the room yet." And the guys looking at me going, but it shows that that room has been cleaned in the system.

Jennifer Elder

Right?

Peter Margaritis

Yeah, that's a little bit. That was a little bit, but a few of those. But

Jennifer Elder

Yes. And speaking of hotels, the other, there are two things I've learned as a solo female traveler. Is number one, prop the door open. When you first go into the room, just in case. If you may walk into somebody's room, you don't know. So, I'll prop the door open, and I can take a quick look around. Then, the second thing I'll do is check and see if there's an adjoining room door and make sure it's locked. I can't tell you the number of times I have gone into a room that has that connecting door and they've left it unlocked. So that someone on the other side could walk right into my room. And then the final thing is once I've checked out the room, now I'm going to lock my door. Because I have had the reverse experience of you. I've been the person in the room when somebody tries to open my door because there's been some mix up at the front desk, and they gave out the same room twice. And somebody wants, you know, I put the latch on the door, but they can push it open. And now the doors open this far, but they're not getting any further. And whoever was on the other side of the door was yelling at me. "Why are you in my room?" "Because the front desk gave it to me?" "No, this is my room." "Okay. You need to go talk to the front desk." "No, I'm not. You need to leave." I'm like, "Not happening." So, I'm calling the front desk. "You need to send somebody up here because this is not safe."

Peter Margaritis

Right? I got, I got to, I was connecting in Atlanta's. Almost a similar story. They closed, they closed the gate door on me probably about 10 minutes beforehand. So, I kind of bypassed the logline, contacted what are the brand hotels, and got a room for the night. So, go and show up and close the door. And about two o'clock in the morning. I'm startled because my front door is now opening. My door to my

room is opening. And I'm going, "what are you doing? It? I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I thought this was my room. It's not my room. I went, "How the hell did you open that door?" He didn't have a key. Well, come to find out the door wasn't, didn't properly lock when I shut it and thought that I completely shut it. So, there was this? That was scary. That one kind of creeped me out a whole lot. Okay, I thought I've seen everything, but now found that.

Jennifer Elder

Oh, there is, now you need to knock on wood. Because you're going to jinx yourself. There is always something else that can go wrong when traveling. The flights being delayed. When I'm traveling, I always, this may be overkill, but it has saved me a number of times, particularly if I'm flying home where it's usually I'm flying home late. So, if there's a problem with my flight, this could mean I'm not getting home until the next day.

Peter Margaritis

Right.

Jennifer Elder

So, one of the things I like to do is look up, what are my alternate flights? What other airlines are flying where I need to go? Because if the flight gets canceled or delayed, so I miss a connection, I want to know what my options are right away. And then I may have the ability to go online, booked that flight and then I'll deal with the airline that, you know, had the issue. But when you have a flight that's delayed or canceled, everybody's going to be trying to rebook their flight.

Peter Margaritis

Right.

Jennifer Elder

If I can rebook mine in the first five minutes, I'm going home.

Peter Margaritis

Absolutely, yeah, that's, I try not to take the last flight out. But there's times that so, coming to Stillwater some time. There's two flights that leave. One at 6:10. One, 2:00. There's no other flights, commercial flights, in and out of Stillwater for the rest of the day. Well, that's leaving. Coming in I think there's a flight that gets in at like 10:30 out of Dallas. But if you miss that, and people around here have said, I'm not going to say the airline but have said that that's happened a number of times. So, they'll, they'll just drive to Dallas, which is about four hours just to avoid that issue. But then there's Tulsa, there's Oklahoma City that you can from Stillwater is like an hour. So, there's alternatives, but not great alternatives. So, I got to travel soon. And I'm just knocking on everything that I that doesn't happen to me.

Jennifer Elder

Well, you're in Stillwater. I'm in New Hampshire. So, my airport is not that big either. And the thing I've learned that flying back to Manchester is that as long as that plane is in Manchester before it has to take off the next morning at 5am.

Peter Margaritis

Yeah.

Jennifer Elder

You don't care what time it gets in. So, you might get home. You just don't know exactly what time it's going to be. But I do know that if I am taking that last flight into Manchester, it's going to get there.

Peter Margaritis

Yeah.

Jennifer Elder

Because that plane has to be there for the morning flight.

Peter Margaritis

Right.

Jennifer Elder

So, that's been one benefit. Typically, I agree with you. I don't take the last flight out. Because especially out of larger airports, because they can shuffle flights around. But for some of the smaller airports, if you're having that last flight, you'll get there. It just may be at 3am.

Peter Margaritis

Yeah, let's leave it at five. That's a really good point. I'm going to remember that. So, let me ask you a question. So, Stillwater is a regional airport and it's quaint. It's cute. But I think that the most endearing thing about it is you don't pay for parking. Do you have to pay for parking in Manchester?

Jennifer Elder

We do. But it's cheap. It's like \$12 a day versus, you know, Boston is like 40 some odd a day.

Peter Margaritis

I, one of my first flights out. I forgot where I was. I was going. I think this was, I was, it could have been Chicago. It may have been when I went to, it doesn't matter. But I go and I come back. And I bill the client. And I get a call from them going, "Hey, I think you forgot to put your airport parking." "No, no, I didn't. Parking is free here!" So, they just laughed and said, "Are you kidding me?" I went, "No, and I hope they keep that for a while."

Jennifer Elder

Now, I do have one other funny small airport story. Years ago, I was giving a presentation in Fairbanks, Alaska.

Peter Margaritis

Ooo!

Jennifer Elder

In February. There is an interesting time to be in Alaska.

Peter Margaritis

Yeah.

Jennifer Elder

You know, Anchorage. Anchorage is about the same weather as Boston. Fairbanks, not so much. That is much further north. Flying out of Fairbanks, going to the airport. And I look for, you know, where's the gate for my flight? It's down a hallway. TSA is in the other direction. And I'm like, wait, what? Don't I have to go through TSA. And so, a couple of years ago, but not that long. And I walked down the hallway. And sure enough, I get to walk right to the gate without going through TSA. And I'm there early. So, there is nobody else at the gate. There are no passengers waiting. Now, that actually isn't that unusual, because the plane is only a nine-seater.

Peter Margaritis

Ah, okay.

Jennifer Elder

And finally, when somebody shows up from the airline, I say, "Did I miss something? Was I supposed to go through TSA? And there's another way of getting here?" And she said, "No, you don't have to go through TSA." I said, "Help me understand what's going on." She said, "This flight can't go any further than Anchorage. There is not a chance you're going anywhere else. So, since you're just flying from Fairbanks to Anchorage, you don't have to go through TSA."

Peter Margaritis

Oh, wow. What if it's still the case?

Jennifer Elder

I couldn't tell you. I have not been back.

Peter Margaritis

Well, it's always good catching up with it. I love it. We've left probably some really horror stories out. It's probably a good idea we did touch on some travel challenges, I would say. But it's, I don't know, I do. I do miss travel. In my world now I'm not traveling as much, which is fine because it was starting to take a little bit of wear and tear. As we get younger, it seems like air travel or just travel in general can be much more of a challenge. So, I, safe travels on your next. What's your next trip?

Jennifer Elder

Next trip? I am going to Pittsburgh?

Peter Margaritis

There you go.

Jennifer Elder

There's an exciting destination. interesting places. Now Pittsburgh is actually a decent airport. Been there before. There are some interesting airports. Have you ever flown out of Dothan, Alabama.

Peter Margaritis

I have not been that lucky.

Jennifer Elder

I think it's a one gate, airport. But to get there, you have to drive through windy, twisty residential roads with no streetlights. And as you're going, there no sign saying you're on the way to the airport. I was crossing my fingers and praying that my GPS was not sending me somewhere I didn't need to go. You leave the highway and, you know, typically an airport is right next to the highway. No, this one is buried deep in the woods.

Peter Margaritis

Ding ding, ding, ding, ding, ding.

Jennifer Elder

Exactly. And all of a sudden you pop out, you know, there's someone's house you're driving by. And, oh, there's the airport.

Peter Margaritis

Oh, wow. Where's that located? It's in Alabama. But what's it close to a major city?

Jennifer Elder

I have no idea. I just remember it was Dothan, Alabama. I believe somebody I think somebody had told me that the airport was built because Procter and Gamble had a manufacturing facility nearby. And it was too far away from other airports.

Peter Margaritis

Other major airports.

Jennifer Elder

It's actually a lovely airport. When you're driving in by yourself in a rental car, and it's, you know, 10 o'clock at night, you really are not sure where you are.

Peter Margaritis

Yeah. I don't think I've had that experience, I think with the smaller airports just like Chattanooga, but there's that little the smallest airport I've ever flown in and out of is Stillwater. And it's, like I said, I've got no complaints, right? It's really quaint. Everybody's really nice and stuff. And it's a one. It's a one gate. You're flying out of gate one. Because there's no gate two or anything else. So, I know you've got a meeting to get to. I appreciate your time. And I look forward to when our paths cross because we got spoiled in November. We were at Chicago.

Jennifer Elder

Yes.

Peter Margaritis

And then.

Jennifer Elder

Rosemont.

Peter Margaritis

Yeah, we, a client of ours, Mars Incorporated, and then Henderson Tax. And it's like we saw each other for like, two days, two days. And then poof, we haven't seen each other face to face. And since then.

Jennifer Elder

I hate when that happens.

Peter Margaritis

I know. We have such a good time when we're together. We're together. The client...

Jennifer Elder

That's the part that makes travel fun!

Peter Margaritis

Yeah, and the client usually doesn't like the food expense we turn it in. But that's a whole different topic as a whole. So, thank you so much for taking the time. I greatly appreciate it. Safe travels and I can't wait to our paths cross again.

Jennifer Elder

Thank you very much, Peter. It's always a pleasure.

Peter Margaritis

I would like to thank Jennifer for having this conversation with us and about how to deal with travel woes. Bring chocolate. Remember, there are people who prefer to say yes, and there are people who prefer to say no. Those who say yes are rewarded by the adventures they have. And those who say no, I'm rewarded by the safety they obtained. Be a Yes person and thank you for listening.