

Episode 117: Summer was stuck in Peru

For a lot of Americans, the idea of traveling – being away from home – is just a routine part of life.

Whether it's a business trip or a vacation, getting on an airplane to go somewhere is pretty common. Most of us don't think twice about it.

But that's not everyone. A recent survey of 2000 Americans revealed some interesting numbers.

13% have never flown in an airplane.

40% of those questioned said they have never left the country.

And 11% of these people said they have never even been outside of the state where they were born.

Those are some surprising statistics, but the fact remains that a lot of people here in the US still love to travel.

And my guest today, Summer, was one of those people. She's traveled all over the country, as well as internationally. And most of the time, it all went fine.

What was scary was the time she left the United States, and couldn't come back.

Scott

Where did you live back in March 2020?

Summer

I lived in Mississippi, which is close to Memphis. Me and my family are still here. We work in Memphis. I was stationed and based here in Memphis. I grew up, was raised in this area, and work here, but travel all over the world.

Scott

One of the places you travel or traveled is Peru, and that's because you had a long-term relationship with a man named Jaime. How did that happen? How did you guys come together?

Summer

Jaime and I met in January 2015. I went on a mission trip and he was one of the local Peruvians there that was helping with our group. He did the logistics and was a translator. He was just a wonderful person and we kind of hit it off. Later that year, we started talking through the internet - WhatsApp, FaceTime, and things like that - and we started seeing each other exclusively towards the end of the year. I was there on the mission thread. The first time I had been in Peru, I traveled all over for different mission trips and different vacations and stuff like that. It was the first time that I had been in Lima. We were there for a week. We really just hit it off. He's very much the total opposite of me. I'm very much of a type A personality. He's got that relaxed South American attitude. We just really hit it off. He's a great guy. So, we had been doing a

long-distance relationship for 5 years. Long-distance relationships are pretty hard. Being on different continents and just that far away was really difficult, but we held it together for 5 years - pretty strong.

Scott

So, after 5 years, you are making plans to go and visit him in Peru.

Summer

Yes.

Scott

Again, this was in March of 2020 - everyone in the world knows now what was about to happen, but all you knew was this mysterious virus was spreading around the world and major events were being canceled - NBA and Major League Baseball canceled their season. Peru had very few cases in the beginning. Were you at all concerned about making this trip?

Summer

December of 2019 was when we started kind of hearing things about this virus in China and things were getting a little weird over in that area of the world. I had already booked my flight because when you're in a long-distance relationship, looking for a flight ahead of time is something that you look forward to. So, I had already booked the flight. I was planning to go in March. I was kind of hearing a little bit about it in December. Then, January and February came along. I remember talking with some friends and co-workers at work and we were, like, "What's going on? What is this?" Like, people still weren't sure what was going on. In fact, I had a work trip out to the West Coast a couple of weeks before I was scheduled to go to Lima and I was a little concerned about doing that trip - not concerned, but was just kind of thinking about it - because I think LA had some cases. So, I was just kind of watching that. Peru had very little cases. I'm not fearful, but I also don't take risks. I'm a planner by nature and, in general, a type A personality where I like to think things through. I looked on the State Department website. It had, I think, a two level 2 warning which is very low for a country. So, I was just, kind of, checking out, like, what the caseload was for them. I had no reservations about going to Lima. Again, I was a little nervous about doing a trip out to the West Coast more so than going to Peru. Little did I know that when I got there, that was the weekend or the week that what I like to call, literally, "The world shut down."

Scott

You fly from Memphis. Of course, that's in Tennessee. You're in Mississippi. So, I was wondering how far that is. Now, realizing Memphis is just over the line and it's, like, 5 minutes from your house - right?

Summer

It is. The airport is, like, very close. We pretty much fly into Atlanta for anything. I had probably been to Lima - he was living in Lima at the time and still is - 10-plus times at this point.

Scott

And it was the same flight route each time, so you're also quite familiar with it.

Summer

Mm-hmm.

Scott

Was there anything unusual about it when you went?

Summer

There was. When I got from Memphis to Atlanta, it seemed okay. Then, I got to the Atlanta airport. I mean, most of us are familiar with Atlanta being the busiest airport, possibly, probably in the world. I get there but it was a little light - like, there's not a ton of people there. I started thinking, "Maybe, people are just getting fearful to fly and canceling trips." Then, I got on the airplane. Usually, the flight is fully booked. This time, it wasn't because it's just a one-way or one flight a day from Delta. It's usually full of folks going back to Lima or a lot of Americans love to go to Machu Picchu - you have to fly into Lima to get to Machu Picchu or Cusco. So I noticed that and, like, even joked - there was a couple sitting across from me. I kind of sneezed and I was like, "I don't have COVID. This is Memphis allergy." Nobody was wearing masks at this point. In fact, this was at the point when the government was telling us, "You don't need to wear masks." Nobody was wearing masks. The flight was a little light. Again, I was in love. I'm not a risk taker, but I also didn't see any kind of concern to continue on the trip.

Scott

What about when you arrived in Lima? Was there anything different then?

Summer

They did take our temperature. They had staff, I guess, from the airport or from the government taking our temperature and that's it. They were not enforcing any kind of "stand 6 feet apart" or even any kind of mask. As a matter of fact, I'll never forget when we were standing in line - the customs line took a little bit longer than normal.

Scott

This was in Lima?

Summer

This was in Lima at the airport. It's basically the same thing. Every time I went there, you'd get off the plane, you go through customs, they would check you, you pick up your luggage, you go through another section of checking, and then you're basically free to leave. There were a lot of folks waiting in line to get through customs. There was a family that was there with homemade masks and they were made out of, like, bra cups. At that point, people were making homemade masks and different things like that, and folks were, like, looking at him like, "This is very odd." It was just a weird, weird time. People were still so confused as to what was going on and they had these homemade masks with straps that were strapped to the pad of the bra. I can remember thinking— I still think about that family, like, "I'm wondering if they got new masks and if they were okay with being that way." We stood in line longer than normal and that was pretty much it. There was nothing besides taking our temperature. Nothing unusual about that.

Scott

So Jaime came and picked you up from the airport. What were your accommodations? Where were you staying?

Summer

I was at an Airbnb in Lima in the San Isidro District, basically, behind his apartment. So I was staying in an Airbnb at Javier Prado, which is their busiest street in Lima. Lima is a very, very busy city. There are lots of people coming to work, lots of traffic, and people walking in and out.

This Airbnb was actually facing this street that has lots of things going on. So I was there. He picked me up - he always picked me up - and we didn't even talk about anything going on with COVID or anything because it was still kind of, like, yeah- there were no warning signs in Peru that they were going to close or anything was going to happen. So, it was just normal conversation. Everything was, like, normal.

Scott

So on the first day you got there, you pretty much get some Peruvian food and visit-

Summer

It was. Peruvian food is so great. His mom is such a wonderful cook. We're just enjoying our time together. At that point, I don't think we had seen each other for several months, so we were just together. I got to see his mom and visit her. It was a Saturday. I left on a Saturday and did not get there until Saturday night. The flight landed at about 11.30 or 12.00. So, that next day, which was Sunday, I was just kind of getting situated for the week, going to talk to his mom, and things like that. Later that night, we were playing Domino's Chickenfoot game and sitting there. His brother called on his phone and he was like, "Did you hear? The President of Peru is shutting the country down in 24 hours." Jaime was very calm. He was speaking Spanish and I don't speak Spanish. So I had no idea what he was saying and the conversation that was going on. He hung up and he told me, like, "My brother is telling me that the President is closing the country down." I was like, "Why is he closing the country down?" I was still like kind of clueless. He said, "Because of the virus." I was like, "Well, what do I do?" I had no idea what to do. I kind of just, like, struck.

It was probably about 9 o'clock at that point, and I knew that there was a Delta flight. Most of the flights leave later in the evening back to the State. So, I ran upstairs and just threw everything into my bag. I didn't even have time to think. I think I even took, like, a pillow from the Airbnb, stuffed it in there, and just tried to get to the airport to get on a flight. "Vacation's over! Vacation is officially over!" Panic, kind of, came over me and I was just like, "What do I do?" He was like, "I'll just drop you off at the front. You just run in." So I went up to the front to talk to the Delta agent, and they were like, "This flight is booked for tonight and it's booked for tomorrow night." I still think I was just, kind of, in shock of like, "What is going on? Like, this is just the weirdest situation." I couldn't call up somebody and say, "Hey, have you ever been stuck in a foreign country during a pandemic? What did you do?"

Scott

There's no precedent for this.

Summer

Oh, there's not. It's nothing like that. So, I got back into the car and he took me back to the Airbnb. I mean, I was defeated. Because I always have a plan A, B, C, and D, I was like, "There's no plan. What's gonna go on? So, it was tough not knowing what to do and you're responsible for getting yourself hung, basically.

Scott

How did you let people know back home? Did you call your parents? How did you contact them?

Summer

I did. They were my first call. I think one of the biggest things for me was having my parents worry. I was safe. I was fine. I was with people that I knew. Besides being in a foreign country during something that's so odd and weird, I wasn't hurt, I wasn't sick, and I wasn't in any harm. It was just the anxiety of being in this foreign country and your family is somewhere else without you. That was probably a sad thing for me. My dad is a retired police officer, so he was really cool and calm about everything, of course. But my mom— I'll always be her baby. I could tell on her face that she was worried. So I calmly told them, like, "Okay, this is the situation. The President is shutting the country down. Nobody can go in or out. No flights. No foot travel. No cars. We had considered this whole, like, "In 24 hours, I can fly to Colombia, which is another country within South America. Maybe, he could drop me over to Ecuador and I could take a flight from there." But then, I was like, "Well, what happens if Ecuador shuts down? I'm stuck there with no one." It was just kind of a "Stay-put and see how it basically plays out" type of situation. My family, of course, trust timing. They knew that I was in good hands and that I was okay, but I hate to put them through that. Like, I don't like that feeling of them being worried. It was a scary time for everybody, whether you were in a foreign country or home country. It was just scary for everyone.

Scott

There's a US Embassy in Peru. Can you contact them or the State Department? Or how did you go from there?

Summer

That was interesting. In the first couple of days, there was nothing - there was no message put on their Facebook page or their website - that gave any indication of "This is what you need to do" or "We're working on this situation." If anybody ever goes out of the country, I do recommend registering yourself through the State Department because, eventually, we were given that message, "You need to register yourself at the State Department to let them know that you're a citizen outside of the United States." I still get emails about things going on in Peru. They give you notes about, like, if there's an earthquake, a demonstration, or something just to kind of warn the citizens. So, I eventually had to sign myself up for the State Department notifications. My main source of information came from a Facebook group of Americans who were stuck in Peru, and that's how I eventually got home - because of the information that I received from that group. It was wonderful. The information that I received and how we came together on that site was very, very valuable.

Scott

How many people were in the Facebook group?

Summer

Thousands. I mean, anybody could get in there - family members. There were so many, like, moms and dads in that group where they had sent, like, their 19-20 year old kid to backpack in the mountains of Peru and they were stuck. That's one thing that was sad about being in the group because you saw so many desperate people. "I don't know what to do. I don't know where to stay." I was in a situation where the folks at the Airbnb let me stay there as long as I needed to and discounted the rate, but there were tourists there that were either, like, coming home and their timing was just terrible - like, they were leaving the day off or whatever and they just got stuck and had nowhere to go. It was pretty heartbreaking to hear some of the things, especially, the Americans that were in - and not only Americans. There were people from all over the world stuck in Peru in Cusco. They had to get from Cusco to Lima to get back home because their airport could not accommodate, like, flights going to different countries. Some of

the stories that were in that group were about people being in Cusco and being doused with bleach by the government, some people tested positive for COVID, locked in the room, and not being able to leave or do anything. It was really heartbreaking to see some of that stuff.

Scott

It sounds like a group like this would somehow make the news in the US, like, "Wow, all these US citizens are stuck." Did it get the attention of politicians or someone who could help?

Summer

It did. We had a few people. The admins of the group really kinda took the lead. Several of us contacted CNN and all the major news outlets. I know a few of the folks that were the admins were on CNN did, like, FaceTime or Zoom interview.

Scott

Were the admins in the US or were they stuck too?

Summer

They were stuck too. Most of them were stuck in Cusco, so they were kind of leading the way in getting the tension. We knew that there were other countries were, kind of, closing like Peru but, to our knowledge, Peru was the strictest. There were not a ton of other countries where they were not letting anyone go in and out. Like, Peru was very, very strict with their COVID quarantines, restrictions, and things like that. So, we kind of band together and we were like, "Well, we need to get the attention." I contacted my representative here in Mississippi - my senator and my representative, Mr. Kelly. His team worked very hard to keep me updated and gave me information about what was going on. The ambassador for the US to Peru left at the beginning when they found out that they were closing the country. He took a flight out with the Peace Corps and left. That was just, like, such a downer for all of us on the group page. It felt like the captain was leaving the ship.

Scott

That's exactly what it was.

Summer

It was. I don't know the reasons behind why he left. It felt a little chaotic. I majored in public relations and we always had a backup plan for any kind of disaster or anything like that. I would have thought that the embassy would keep a tab on natural disasters or pandemics - this is what you do. I didn't feel like that at that point. The ambassador leaving was really a punch in the gut. We were kind of like, "What do we do?" So, we banded together on this Facebook group and contacted as many people. I have a friend who used to work for Anderson Cooper, and I was like, "Hey, can you reach out to your friends and see if they want to pick this up? We're stuck here. This is something that we need to let people know about. There's no way we're going to get home unless the government intervenes, sends planes, or talks to the Peruvian government."

Scott

Were you concerned at all about being an American in another country? I mean, you mentioned some of the mistreatment of the tourists. Did you experience any of that yourself?

Summer

Being with Jaime - he's from that area - he always tells me, "Summer, you can't act like an American here with liberty and freedom, especially during this time. You can't be that way." Again, this was a time when we were told, "You don't have to really wear masks." I didn't even have a mask. Like, that was a concern. While I was there. I was like, "Where did you get masks? Do you all have masks here?" I'm sure they did in the pharmacy.

Scott

Well, they had bras, right?

Summer

(Chuckles) Yeah. They definitely did that. I could have resorted to doing that if I needed to.

Scott

So you had masks with you the whole time - you didn't know!

Summer

Yeah, exactly. We were in the grocery store one time when a police officer came up to me and said something to me in Spanish. I was like, "I don't understand. I'm sorry." He pointed, like, "Get your mask on." So that was the only time. Then, of course, the news - not only the American news but the Peruvian news - was showing tanks blocking off streets. I didn't see any of that. I mean, being in a foreign country, not necessarily knowing the rules, getting put in jail, and just different things like that was a concern. But again, I'm not a risk taker so I wasn't out boycotting anything. I stayed in the Airbnb which was hard for me because I like to go out, walk, and things like that. It was really eerie because the city was basically shut down. They had a curfew, so you couldn't be out after, like, 9 o'clock. You had to be in your house or your apartment. I mean, even people walking their dogs - they would get on to them or put them in jail if they were out past the curfew. Javier Prado - the street - was dead. Nothing. No cars. No transportation. No taxis. Nothing. That was a little creepy. A city that was so bustling and busy was basically dead. Everybody was in their apartment.

So as the days went on, people were chattering on the Facebook group and they said, "You need to sign up with the State Department and they'll call you. They'll ask you if you're still interested in going back to the United States. Then, they'll assign you a day to come up to the embassy, put you on a flight, and you'll go home, basically." So I was actually standing in line to get into the grocery store because they had started implementing just a few people in the grocery stores at the time. We were standing in line to go to the grocery store. There was another American behind me and we just started talking about it. He was, of course, stuck there. We became friends on Facebook. We were still just following the Facebook group. They even had started a Google Doc Sheet of your name and just different in different information. They were providing it to the embassy and also sending that through the State Department to get home. A couple of days later, this guy sent me a message and he was just like, "Hey, just want to let you know that I just happened to go to the embassy, they got me on a flight, and I'm going home. So, you may want to try doing that."

So, I got up the next day ready to go. Jaime was able to take me to the embassy because he had a cousin that was a police officer. The police officer basically escorted us to the embassy because there were roadblocks and the police officers would have ask, like, "Why are you out? Where are you going?" If not, I would have taken an Uber to the embassy. So we went there and stood in line for about 2-3 hours in front of the embassy and got to the front and, like, literally, about 2 people missed it for that day. They were taking elderly people, which I totally

respect and am fine with that. I saw a pregnant woman who looked like she was about to give birth and women and children in front like Titanic kind of thing. So I was fine with that. It gave me an advantage because I actually talked to the embassy. At that point, things were more organized. It was, like, getting to be a well-oiled machine for them.

The State Department had sent down a diplomat, Julie Chung. We actually, kind of, had a joke on our Facebook group - it was, like, #SaveUsJulie and things like that. They sent her down there. They had all branches of the military there. I believe they brought in the DEA, the drug enforcement folks from the jungle because the United States had people stationed, I guess, all over the world for stuff like that. They brought them in from the jungles of Peru to kind of help get us situated. So, the embassy got it together, was very helpful and very kind. If anything that day, it got me on their radar. Like, they're like, "Okay, she is here. She wants to go home." Later that night, I got a call from somebody in the State Department who said, "Okay, you're on the next flight the next day. You need to be at the embassy at 8. Just bring your luggage and all your documents, and we'll get you on a flight."

Scott

That's the reassuring phone call you wanted to get.

Summer

Yes. I had a panic moment. Like, that whole day, I was like, "What if they tried to call me and it won't go through my phone? Am I going to miss it?" But they were able to get through. When I got the call, I was like, "Yes! Yes! I want to go! Please put me on that flight! I'll be good to go!"

Scott

And that flight was the next day?

Summer

Yes. The flight was the next morning. I arrived and there were people already standing in line ready to go. The Mormon faith had their young missionaries there that were leaving. So, I probably was the only non-Mormon in this fight going home. I knew that it was pretty bad because, again, everybody was still kind of confused as to what was going on in the world. I mean, we know it's because of the virus now. But I was catching up with mom and dad back home about what's going on there and they were talking about people hoarding toilet paper, and I was like, "What a weird time to be alive." That stuff wasn't really happening there. We had to stand in line to get into grocery stores and stuff like that. I knew when I saw all the Mormons sending their missionary folks home, I was like, "This has got to be bad. This is really serious." I stood in line for a couple of hours, got to the front, and they processed my paperwork. Then, we waited on a bus for about another hour or two.

Before I got on the flight, we had heard through the Facebook page that they were going to send, like, military planes to come and get us, which was kind of a weird thought. They ended up contracting out United and, I believe, Delta to come and, basically, take us home. At this point, to me, it felt like it was an exchange of tourists or citizens because, when we got to the Air Force hangar, we didn't go through the normal process of going home through the airport security - we didn't do any of that. We were taken on 3-4 charter buses. The US military got to the point like, "This is what we're going to do. You're going to get on this bus. Then, you're going to get off this bus and you're going to wait in this line." Like, it was very rigid, but it was a welcomed kind of structure. So, we got off the bus and sat in a huge hangar, which is the Peruvian Air Force hangar, and waited there for another couple of hours, while they process us.

We had our luggage with us. We literally just sat there while the dog came through to sniff for security reasons. Then, the Peruvian government came through and stamped our passports so that it showed that we left the country because, if not, it would be messed up. So that was all processed and we got on the flight. They dropped this particular flight off in DC. We didn't know until, like, the day of, but they would say, "You'd either be dropped off in DC or you'll be dropped off in Miami. Once you got back into the United States, you have to find your way back to your home." So once they did their duty, you were on your own.

Scott

Then it's a Planes, Trains and Automobiles kind of situation.

Summer

Exactly. I will say this. Delta was really a shining star in this whole situation. I talked to them probably 15 times over the course of being there. Every time, they couldn't really do anything because they couldn't bring a plane in but I was just like, "Hey, I got to cancel my flight because they kept rescheduling the flights, which was so frustrating." Like, these commercial airlines weren't sure what was going on, so they just would keep canceling the flight and then rescheduling it for the next week and then canceling that. So, every time I'd call them, they were like, "We are so sorry. If there's anything else I can do for you, let me know, but we can't get you home basically."

Scott

So did you fly back on Delta or United?

Summer

I flew back in United. The government contracted United to get us out. They dropped us off in DC. Then, that's where I called Delta and I was like, "Hey, can you get me back to Memphis?" and they were on it and they got me home.

Scott

So the flight from Lima to DC— did you have to pay for that?

Summer

Oh, yes. We had to pay for the flights, which are expected. I did not expect taxpayers to have to pay for the flight to get home. They said it would be what a flight would be to Lima which is not necessarily true because it was a pretty hefty fee. If we didn't pay it in time - we had to pay it to the State Department - our passports would be revoked and we'd have to pay it. So, basically, we owed the government for that flight which was, again, what I expected and what I wanted to do. I did not expect a free ride, but not at the price they made us pay.

Scott

Do you want to say what the price was?

Summer

It was \$1,500 for a flight. It's not that much

Scott

For a flight, that would normally be... I mean, probably, Lima to Miami may be \$500?

Summer

Oh, probably even less. Yeah. I mean, from Memphis to Atlanta, Atlanta to Lima, the most I've ever paid was \$800 - that was during, like, a peak season. So, when I got that bill, I was like, "Oh, my goodness, I'll pay this, but this is uncomfortable."

Scott

Yeah, well, you're not in a good negotiating position.

Summer

That's not at all. At that point, you're just like, "I'll give you my firstborn if you just get me."

Scott

So how did you get from DC to Memphis? How far is that?

Summer

I had to fly to Atlanta again and it was probably just a couple of hours flight. I had to stay over in DC because of a day's worth of just waiting and getting on the flight because it's about a 6.5-hour flight from Atlanta to Lima. It's not a bad flight at all, but DC is just a little bit further. So, it was about a 7-hour flight. Then, I had to stay overnight in DC. I mean, I was on the first flight back home. I probably could have stayed in the airport and then come through Atlanta to get home to Memphis. Wow. If you want to talk about creepy, again, like, no one was in the Atlanta airport. Anyone was hardly coming back and I was just like, "Man, this is so weird." You're just in this kind of bubble and your head was in a fog. You've just spent 19 days trying to get home. Then, you came back to your home and I felt like I was in different land or something. It was just odd. It was off.

Scott

But at least you're back in the US. Of course, domestic flights were going to be easier to arrange than international at that time anyway.

Summer

At that point, there was some uncertainty about even domestic flights being available. My parents were like, "We'll come and pick you up wherever." I had family members and friends that were, like, "We'll come and get you wherever you are." So, as long as I could get back into the United States, I knew that I could get home, so that wasn't a concern.

Scott

Probably, some people live in California or somewhere else and they still had to find their way home as well.

Summer

Exactly. Right.

Scott

From the time you arrived in Lima until you finally got back home, how much time had passed?

Summer

It was exactly 19 days. I left on Saturday, March 14, and I did not get home until Wednesday, April 1. So, it was 19 days of pure anxiety of, "What do I do? Who should I contact? Am I missing something?" I knew I would eventually get home. It wasn't a feeling of, "I'm never gonna get home." It was just the feeling of, "What do I do? How does this kind of work?"

Scott

Yeah, I can imagine that. I mean, like you. I'm a planner. I like to have everything set out and I know what's going to happen. So, I get a little bit stressed out just traveling normally. But in a situation like this, I mean, that's just off the charts.

Summer

Yeah, it was a different feeling. It's kind of odd. I went to Italy one time for a friend's wedding and we actually got stuck there for about 48 hours, and that was a little stressful - just the situation of getting home that way. Then, this happened and people were like, "You're not going out of the country ever again. You're staying here." It built character and helped you do better.

Scott

But nobody wants to travel with you though, right?

Summer

They're like, "No, thank you. No, thank you."

Scott

Would you have done anything differently - looking back on it now? Or do you have any regrets about any part of it?

Summer

I do. I wish that I was having more time with Jaime. We didn't know at that time that we would not see each other for 2 years. This past March will be 2 years since we've seen each other. Peru is still very much pretty strict - they kind of led up a little bit. The quarantine measures and the whole situation for them were very, very, very strict, so I couldn't go to see him due to immigration, which is very difficult doing it the right way. He couldn't come here because he has to have a visa. So, I think God gave us that extra time to see and be with each other and I kind of spent it obsessing about how am I going to leave. I wish I had spent more time enjoying that time with him instead of constantly fretting. We watched a lot of Netflix. We did some workout videos on YouTube. I cooked a lot because we couldn't really go out of the apartment. We walked around the neighborhood with our masks on and things like that. But I wish I'd spent more time with him and enjoyed that time.

Scott

Inside the US or outside the US, that's kind of what people remember about those early months - Netflix and Tiger King.

Summer

Yeah. And poor Jaime was like, "What is wrong with you Americans?" I was like, "I don't know. I'm like these people. Their lives are way worse than what I'm going through right now. It's making me feel a little better." I can see people quarantined and cooped up in their house because that's what we had to do. Again, when I got back to the United States, people were still doing that somewhat but were able to freely go walk in a park. Here, where I live, it wasn't as strict as even some areas in the United States. So having that freedom back again— I know that sounds so silly but being somebody that likes to go go go, I could see where people who are quarantined, staying in their apartments, get so depressed, and just so sad. Like, it changes you mentally. That was something that was a little scary for me because I was like, "I can't stay in this Airbnb all day long just sitting here watching TV." I need to get out. I need to breathe fresh

air. So, that was something that was a little different for me. Then, getting back home, I enjoyed being able to get out, drive my car, and do things like that.

Scott

When you fly now to Peru or really anywhere outside the US, do you ever have it in the back of your head that something like that might happen again?

Summer

Well, I haven't been out of the country since this incident. I told my mom after I came back, "I have a little bit of PTSD kind of issues. Like, it's gonna be a long time before I go back to Peru or leave the country." I travel within the United States, of course, for work and things like that. But yeah, I definitely will think about that and kinda have a game plan. If it wasn't for the US government coming in to get us out, we probably are— I'm not going to say we'd probably still be there because we eventually could leave, but it would have been months and months. So yeah, I do think about things like that. Eventually, one day, I'll get back into traveling outside of the United States and probably sign up for the State Department in whatever country I'm going to make sure I get notifications and to make sure that they know that I'm there.

Scott

I wasn't aware of that. That's really good advice to give - register yourself just so they know that you're there. That's a good idea.

Summer

It is. It's funny because I always think it's our responsibility. Like, once you leave the country, the government really doesn't necessarily have to come to help you - it would be nice that they do. In a situation like this, government intervention had to happen for us to get out. I think Peru was only letting, like, I want to say, 10 flights out per day from the country. I think the United States had 3-4 if my numbers are right. I know when we were waiting in the hangar, I saw a Swiss airplane, Israeli airplane, and Mexican airplane, but the United States had a majority of those airplanes. It took a diplomat and the President of the United States and his staff to basically negotiate, "Hey, we need to get these folks out." So, at that point, we had to have the government intervene because there was no way we could have done it on our own.

Scott

So politicians actually did something good.

Summer

They did. Going through this whole immigration process, I've been kind of jaded with government stuff. Things have gone so wrong with that. My representative from the state of Mississippi, really, was kind of a light for me to say, "Okay, they are helping. They are doing. They are serving the public." So it made me see that. If anything, I learned that the government is helping. They were helping and I'm very appreciative of that.

Scott

Doing their job, yeah.

Summer

Absolutely.

Scott

Let's hope that it doesn't happen again.

Summer

Oh, no.

Scott

Thanks for sharing your story!

Summer

Thank you. Thank you for having me. I really appreciate it.

Scott

There's an interesting side note about this story. You heard Summer talking about that Facebook group she was in, with people who were stranded in Peru and their family members. Well, one of the people in that group was a celebrity – it was Dee Snider, who's an actor, songwriter, and probably best known as the lead singer in the band Twisted Sister. He was in this Facebook group because his daughter was stuck in Peru. I reached out to Mr. Snider to see if he would like to provide some perspective on his experience during this time, but his management team advised me that he would unfortunately not be able to participate in the podcast episode.

And now I have some big news, and it has to do with my mom. Her name is Karen.

If you've listened to the past episodes of this podcast, you may have heard my mom. I brought her on the show around the time Covid was just starting to go crazy, and everyone was staying home. Here's a clip from the opener of episode 48:

Karen

Hello, my name is Karen. I'm 77 years old and I'm Scott's mom.

Scott

Yep, that's my mom. I'm an optimist, and I inherited that from her. She lives about 5 minutes from me, in a condo that she and my dad bought about 3 ½ years ago. They moved in and were only there about 3 days before my dad went in the hospital and passed away shortly after that. So she lives there alone, and we see her pretty regularly, but now we have this virus situation and we all have to stay home. What does she do all day? Well, she stays pretty busy.

Karen

I like to start my day by taking a walk. When I get back home, I sometimes have a list of things that I want to accomplish during the day - sometimes, I do and, sometimes, I don't. I'm retired, so I can do what I want.

Scott

Did I mention, she stays busy?

Karen

I can mop the floors and dust. I can get on my computer and play games. I can call a friend. I can encourage them and get phone calls. I can do jigsaw puzzles on my computer. I can play games on my phone. I'm catching up on my reading.

Scott

But wait, there's more!

Karen

Reading my Bible through this year in chronological order. I'm taking Bible courses on BBN. I do laundry. On Sundays, we have lunch together - I'd have lunch together with family on Zoom. I do the ladies Bible study on Tuesday night on Zoom. I do another ladies Bible study on Wednesday night on Zoom. On Saturday morning, I do Weight-watchers on Zoom.

Scott

Holy cow, my mom is retired and she's busier than I am!

Karen

(Chuckles) I don't do all that every day.

Scott

At this point, she understands the importance of staying home. But there was this one time a couple of weeks

Scott

This summer my mom had her 80th birthday. She still walks a couple of miles most mornings and she's doing fine. Every so often, she has everyone over to her place for a game night. So it's me and my wife and our two kids, and my brother's family with their boys, and a girlfriend. And I say kids, but of course they're all adults now.

Anyway, a few weeks ago she invited everyone over, and we're all there, just kind of chatting. And mom announces that she has something to say to all of us. She has an announcement. Well, that got everyone's attention. We're all wondering, what's going on? What are we about to hear?

That's when my mom told us the news: she's getting married.

And I'd have to say that's probably the biggest surprise I have ever had. I never would have predicted that. None of us would have.

So who is this guy, her soon to be new husband?

His name is Jim. His family and our family have been friends literally my whole life. Jim and his wife Janet had 3 girls, and in our family we have 3 boys, and we all grew up together in Ohio. They were over at our house, we were at their house, Jim and my dad worked together, we were just always very close. At some point when I was a teenager, they moved to Indiana, and then later we moved to Florida. But we've always kept in touch.

Jim's been alone since Janet passed away in 2019. So here we have these two people, both still in good health, who have known each other for something like 60 years. And even though no one could have guessed it, it really does make perfect sense that they would get together. And yes, since Jim has 3 girls and my mom has 3 boys, there have been mentions that this is a real-life Brady Bunch. And we're all really happy for them.

The wedding is November 12 of this year, 2022. If you'd like to send them a card, you're welcome to. Just send it to Karen and Jim, care of my address, which is PO Box 5, Safety Harbor, Florida, 34695, and I'll pass it along to the newlyweds.

So enough with the personal stuff, let's get on to this week's Listener Story. We end each episode of the podcast with a story that's been sent in by a listener. It can be funny, sad, inspiring, whatever – so if you have something interesting that you can tell in about 5 minutes, record a voice memo on your phone and email it to me – Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com.

This week's story is gonna make you smile. Stay safe, and I'll see you in two weeks.

(Listener Story)

Hi, Scott. My name is Samantha. I was just listening to your bonus episode of childbirth stories, and one thing was missing - my story. My second child, my son, was extremely healthy throughout the pregnancy. There were no indications of any health issues at all. The labor was fairly quick - I wouldn't say easy, but he came out with no problem at all. I looked down at him and I said, "Oh, he has Down syndrome." I remember very vividly the midwife shushing me. I looked back at her and said, "Look at him. Look at his eyes. They're all in shape. They're beautiful. But he has Down syndrome." I have to say that, at that moment, it was probably the most frightened and unsure I've ever been. I had so many questions about what this child would be like, "Would I be able to take care of him? Would he love me? Would he be able to speak?" So many ridiculous thoughts came through my mind. Today, he is 9 years old and the greatest blessing of my life. I have grown so much as a person just being able to be his mother. He is smart. He is funny. He is mischievous. My favorite part of his birth story is when I asked him, "When you were born, what was the first word that you said to mommy?" And he said, "Surprise!!!"