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FREQUENT FLIER

## A Tortured Walk in a Deep Freeze

By DAVE STEIN

I was delivering a speech at a company's annual sales meeting in Edmonton, Alberta, home of the infamous Alberta clipper storms that were responsible for most of the snow dumped in the northern Midwest of the United States this winter.

My assistant warned me it would be very cold when I arrived. "Bring long underwear and your warmest clothes," she said. "In fact, you should put your long underwear on before you leave the plane."

I nodded. No way was I doing that.

It was minus 32 degrees Centigrade when we landed. "Pretty cold, eh?" the Air Canada pilot remarked as we pulled up to the gate. I tried to recall my high school lesson on temperature conversion. Was it  $5/9$  of C minus 32? Or 32 plus  $5/9$  of C?

You don't feel that kind of cold for the first few minutes, so the short walk out of the terminal in Edmonton to the taxi was anticlimactic. It seemed like no big deal.

The next morning I decided to walk the five blocks from my hotel to the site of my speech. It was 6:30 a.m., and I had yet to hear the day's weather forecast. Out of concern, the hotel's night manager was summoned when I asked for directions. "Why don't you take a taxi?" he asked.

Was he serious? A taxi for five blocks? I grew up in the Bronx. I could handle the cold.

And for the first few minutes, I could. As I made my way to the meeting, wearing layer upon layer, I didn't feel a thing. The street was deserted. These Canadians sure are thin-



Suzy Allman for The New York Times  
Dave Stein, founder of the Stein Advantage Inc., a New York consulting firm, outside his Mahopac, N.Y., home.

skinned, I thought.

Then, it hit me without warning. Excruciating pain knifed through every one of my sinus cavities. I reflexively wrapped my scarf around my mouth, nose and ears even tighter and plowed on. Only two and a half blocks to go. I was channeling the Mount Everest climber and author, Jon Krakauer, of "Into Thin Air."

I decided to pick up the pace, despite a thick sheet of ice caked on the sidewalks. Bad decision. Moving faster only increased my need for oxygen. I was now sucking more air and coughing violently as my alveoli went cryogenic.

One block left.

Come on, I thought. I've jumped out of a plane, walked on hot coals, mountain-biked across northern Thailand. I could do this.

I remembered a story about what happens when you spit in very cold weather. I just had to try it. I removed my scarf just long enough to spit. It froze before it hit the ground.

Finally, there I was. I opened the door, walked inside, and ended my tortured walk in the deep freeze.

I related my story to my audience that morning. It gave new meaning to the term icebreaker. They thought I was nuts. "Why didn't you take a taxi?" someone asked.

I later learned that the average low temperature in Edmonton in January is 1 degree Fahrenheit. That morning it was minus 53 Centigrade with the wind chill factor. That's a whopping minus 63 Fahrenheit.

Back in my office, I proudly related the experience to my assistant (careful to leave out the part about not wearing long underwear). To which she replied, "Why didn't you take a taxi?"

*As told to Christopher Elliott.*