

# The Overseas Flying Rabbits

*Author Unknown*

In 2002, after ten years of living and working in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, my husband and I decided that we were ready to return to the United States. Our menagerie included Sidney, a 12-year-old Beagle-terrier mix with a heart murmur, Daisy, a 6-year-old arthritic Dutch-cross with a chronic upper respiratory infection, and Smudge, an easily stressed 5-year-old Californian who, along with her 5-year-old albino companion China, had been dumped and then terrorized by wild dogs before coming to us. We also had Beauregard, a 2-year-old gentle albino giant, once sickly and abandoned, and our most recent addition, Mikey, a young 10-month-old Californian who was intelligent and friendly.

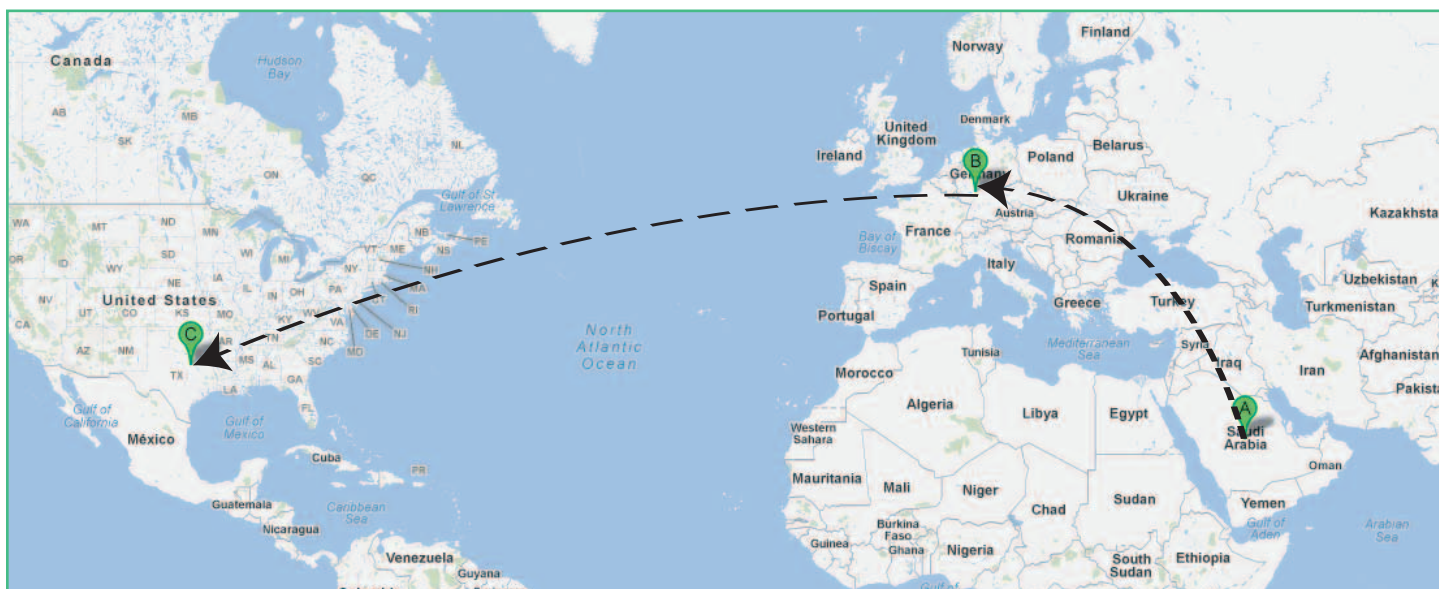
My husband David and I agreed that we would not leave without any of the animals. I knew from reading EtherBun and House Rabbit Society information that airplane travel with rabbits was

a gamble. Flying six animals home would not be simple. Nevertheless, I knew that I had only two options for our rabbits: fly them home in the cargo hold, or have them all euthanized before we left. I was nauseated at the thought of the 24 hour flight for our bunnies, but decided that the cargo hold was better than the alternative.

Months ahead of our departure, I began calling major airlines to ask about flying the rabbits home. My heart sank as I went through the phone book and called each carrier who flew into the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. I received flat answers of "NO" from most carriers, and a vague response from KLM that it had a moratorium on carrying rabbits, with no lifting of the moratorium in sight. Sick to my stomach, I dialed the number for Lufthansa, my last hope. Yes, they would accept our rabbits as long as we had the required health certificates and I could guarantee that the animals would be admitted at our point of destination. It took me weeks of hunting through

U.S. Customs and U.S. Department of Agriculture websites, and e-mailing airport personnel at the airport of our arrival, Dallas/Fort Worth, before I accumulated enough evidence for the airline. Satisfied with the documentation from the websites and by e-mails from me, Lufthansa accepted my reservations for six animals. If we wanted to take possession of our animals at the same time that we received our luggage, we needed to be sure to label the rabbits as unaccompanied baggage and not ship them as cargo.

As our time of departure drew near, we gathered together supplies needed for the journey: four kennel crates for shipping the six animals, water bottles, plenty of old towels, letters from our vet confirming that the rabbits were disease free, had never been inoculated with a pathogen, or had ever been a laboratory animal, and lengthy health summaries for our two female rabbits who had had a variety of rabbit ailments. Of course, we also had the required health certificates from our



*Flying six animals home would not be simple. I was nauseated at the thought of the 24 hour flight for our bunnies (stopping in Frankfurt, Germany, but decided that the cargo hold was better than the alternative.*

veterinarian and I had each animal micro-chipped as an extra precaution.

During this time, Sidney, the best rabbit dog in the world, who had found one of our rabbits as a sick baby on the street, developed severe congestive heart failure. We watched him deteriorate rapidly during a one-week period, and sobbing, were with him when a caring local vet came to our house to euthanize him. Broken-hearted, we buried him and prepared to leave him behind as we kept him with us in our hearts.

Smudge, always high maintenance and easily stressed, stopped eating and became inactive the night before our scheduled departure. An emergency visit to our vet confirmed that she was in gastro-intestinal stasis. We had treated her for this condition on many occasions and each time I worried that she might not recover. We began administering fluids and medications, and I took her home and kept her warm and gave her abdominal massages. The next morning she was much improved, but her condition added to our anxiety for her upcoming journey.

On the night of our departure, I fed the rabbits as much greens as they would eat and placed a Ziploc bag full of greens inside each container for the Lufthansa personnel to offer to the rabbits during the stopover in Frankfurt. Each crate had layers of towels, a full water bottle, travel bowls that were filled with pellets, and what I hoped was enough hay to last the trip. I had taped pictures of each rabbit to the outside of the kennels, with their names on them. Inside and outside of each crate also bore our new address in Fort Worth, Texas, along with my parents' phone number. Beauregard and Daisy were together, Smudge and China were together, but Mikey traveled alone. When the large Chevy Suburban we

had reserved pulled up to take us to the airport, I gave Smudge a painkiller and the prescribed medications for her stasis. I kissed all of them, told them that we'd be at the other end for them, put them in their crates and began our journey.

At the airport, check-in went smoothly and I handed instructions to the airline agent, who assured me that the directions would be followed. I watched as each crate was loaded onto the conveyor belt and slowly moved out of my sight. Well, I thought, that's it. I hope we've done the right thing. Upon boarding the flight, I asked the stewardess if I could speak to the captain, but she was doubtful that we would be able to do so. Eventually he did come speak to me and I told him that we had five much-loved animals in the cargo hold and that I hoped that the climate and pressure was monitored for them. He assured me that he knew that our animals and others were there and that he would be sure that the cargo hold would be safe for them.

At our stopover in Frankfurt we begged the Lufthansa agents to let us see the rabbits, especially since Smudge had been ill. They refused but later told me that they had checked on the rabbits and that all were alive and well. Traveling after 9/11 severely impacted any chance that I might have had of seeing them in transit. Once again, I hoped that I had done the right thing for them.

Upon arrival at the Dallas/Fort Worth airport, we anxiously awaited for the baggage handlers to bring the rabbits to us. I wondered how any of them could survive the journey, what were they thinking, were they terrified?? Finally the elevator door from the baggage area below opened and all of the crates with our rabbits were

brought out. I quickly inspected each crate. ALIVE! Each one was alive and looked back at me with both doubt and annoyance. Even in my rush of relief, I noted with dismay that the Ziploc bags were completely full and that all of the water bottles had fallen, and some of the pellets were sopping wet, as were all of the towels. Nevertheless, I was so overjoyed to see them alive that I gave silent thanks for their arrival. I reached inside their crates and began opening their bags of food and offering the still unbelievably fresh greens to them. My husband and I walked the three crates, five suitcases and carry-on baggage through Immigration and Customs. U.S. Customs asked only to see the health certificates and passed us through with no further questions.

Although I had made the arrangements and planned the trip, David's complete support and cooperation boosted my resolve to continue. Together, we had brought our rabbits half way around the world. Our journey was over!!!!

Sadly, a week after our arrival, we lost China; the stress of the journey must have been too much for her. I had obtained and then misplaced the name of a good rabbit vet in the area and lost much valuable time trying to find one. When I found one who seemed capable, we instituted measures to prevent stasis, but China never recovered. I am still saddened that she's gone. Beauregard and Daisy, and Smudge and her now companion Mikey, are well and happy with us. They have their own sunroom, and I'm proud of the fact that they flew 10,000 miles and are still going strong.

I'd do it all again in a thump to have them safe here with us.

