

It's Elementary.

Anthony Element

The Dummy's Guide to Gardening

Let me say at the outset that I love gardens. It's just when they add the "ing" on the end that I lose interest.

This has been a source of some contention in our marriage. Marie likes gardening, while I would happily live in a high rise apartment on the principle that we'd be swapping a garden for a view, and the view requires no effort on my part. We compromised by buying a townhouse, which has a garden the size of a few postage stamps; it's a compromise that, in truth, probably satisfies neither of us. It's not a real garden for Marie, but still requires a minimum amount of effort from me.



And being the lazy sod that I am, well, enough said.

On such compromises marriages are built... Have I mentioned before that Marie is an exceptionally tolerant person? (If you know me, then, of course, this will come as no surprise.) As I reach an age where working in the garden is more or less expected of me, I suspect this makes me a bit of failure with everyone, kids, wife and neighbours. The problem is that I've never enjoyed doing any activity that I know I'm going to have to do again real soon.

Which, by the by, explains why I'm equally not crazy about a bunch of other ways of spending my time, like washing clothes, vacuuming the floor and doing the dishes, but that's another story entirely.

Can we all say, "Amah" boys and girls?

Same applies to doing repairs around the house.



Actually, Marie and I have a good division of labour when it comes to home maintenance; she identifies problems and I think about them. One of the things I'll never understand about those of the female persuasion is that they ask us men to do something and then six months later nag us about it. Look, I said I'd do it.

Getting back to gardening, aside from the fact that you get dirty doing it, everything takes place about a metre too low. I'm simply not built to do my best work at the level of the soles of my feet. And I'm approaching an age where bending over needs a certain amount of preplanning. Also I pretty much refuse to do anything that requires me to spend time on my knees. Of course, if my arms were a metre longer...



And here's another thing about a garden. A gardener spends a tiny amount of time actually planting, and then the rest of his or her gardening time is spent cutting, trimming picking or pulling stuff out by the roots. Most of what a gardener does is downright destructive. So what's that about? It all adds up to hard work.

Now I know what they say, hard work never hurt anyone, but, well, I just don't want to take any chances. If you want to know the really worst thing about gardening, it's lawns; humanity's single most illogical invention. You spend a bucket load on stuff to make the damned thing grow, and then you have to cut it, and find a way to get rid of the clippings. Where's the sense in that?

Back when we had a married quarter, we had a front yard, which in turn had a pale imitation of a lawn. It wasn't green enough to actually be a lawn. So I had to get a mower. I bought one of those things that had no wheels and you plugged it in and dragged a cord behind you. I think it was called a flymo. Which was a complete rip off. It didn't fly. And it sure as hell didn't mow.

But that said, I really do enjoy being in a garden.

On various trips to the UK, we've visited several stately homes, (all run by the National Trust, because the original owners could no longer afford them.) These homes are dotted all over the place and many have superb gardens. They make you realize what a helluva good life it must have been if you were rich and living in the UK during the 19th Century. But then,





I have this theory that it'd be a helluva good life if you were rich and living pretty much anywhere, anywhen.

But I digress... (I know, that's a cliché. I often wonder though, who it is that makes up clichés.)

I discovered that many of these gardens were designed back in the 18th Century by a fellow named Capability Brown. My immediate reaction to that gem was that his parents deserved a good slap upside of the head for naming their son 'Capability'. I later discovered that they didn't. They actually named him Lancelot, which, now I come to think of it, is nearly as bad.



View from the Front of Harewood House.

Anyway, ole' Capability designed more than a hundred and seventy gardens, many of which still exist today. One of the best examples of his work is Harewood House near Leeds, West Yorkshire. While some might say that the front yard is a tad over the top

As you can see, Capability didn't do flower beds or vegetables, he shaped entire landscapes. The lake and its surrounding area were actually constructed on what originally was a small creek. Closer to home, most days, we go for our morning walk through Southbank here in Brisbane and for me it never loses its magic. The beautiful bougainvillea walkway, fountains, a lake with a beach, a tropical garden, a Nepalese temple, all within view of the CBD and the river, and built where, before the 1988 expo, there was nothing but old factories and warehouses.



The back yard, is magbloodynificent.

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Aerial view of Southbank.

To show just what a difference a decent landscape gardener can make, here's what Southbank looked like some years before the 1988 Expo.



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One of the things I enjoy most about walking through Southbank is seeing all these council workers toiling away. And I'm not one of them. It warms my heart just thinking about it.

Yes, I think there's nothing more perfect than being in a garden that somebody else has to look after.

Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 (MH370).



It's been more than 12 months now – and we still don't know what happened!!

On Saturday March 18, Malaysia Airlines flight 370 took off from Kuala Lumpur heading to Beijing. No one knows the fate of the aircraft and the 239 people (227 passengers and 12 crew) on board or what actually happened; but Inmarsat came to the spotlight by providing vital information for the search.



(Inmarsat, the Mobile Satellite Service (MSS) operator, was in the eye of a global media storm as it became a pivotal player in the search for the aircraft. Their satellites and technology played a key role in trying to locate where the aircraft may have ended up.)

The search to find out what happened to the MH370 flight began in earnest. As days ticked on by, it became apparent there would be no happy ending and that those on board were lost. However, with the families of those involved wanting closure and the international community wanting explanations, there has been a huge intensity to the search, which so far has yielded no physical evidence. Inmarsat was in the eye of the storm and became a key contributor in the international search for the missing aircraft – a search which has become one of the biggest global hunts of recent times.

Initial press reports suggested that the aircraft might have gone down in the South China Sea, but thanks to satellite technology, authorities turned to the southern part of the Indian Ocean, west of Australia. It is here that the international search for the aircraft continues to this day. It was due to technology improvements and upgrades to its ground network — which Inmarsat undertook in 2013 — that sufficient data from MH370 was available to guide the international search team; a few numbers could make a huge difference.

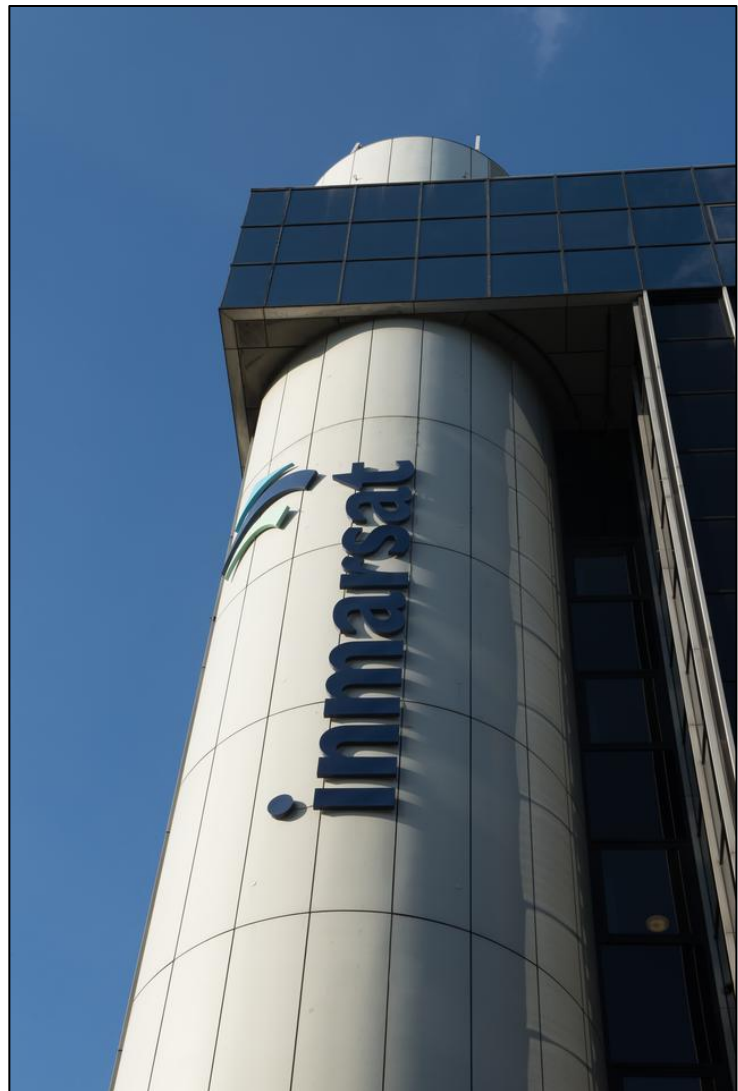


If it wasn't for the data supplied by immarsat, the search area would be 100 million square kilometers,

During the week immediately following the disappearance of MH370, Immarsat started to examine the information in its logs that it believed could prove useful. The company was quick to engage with the investigators and to explain what this data was saying about the likely flight path. At the peak of the search, Inmarsat received 3,000 media requests in four days, an unheard of amount for a satellite operator and the media scrum that materialized outside Inmarsat's headquarters in Old Street, London in late March, showed the hunger for information related to MH370.

Inmarsat headquarters in London.

They had engineering logs from their Perth ground station relating to the missing plane. These told that the Inmarsat terminal on-board the flight had continued to operate for many hours after the contact was lost when the aircraft left Malaysian airspace. The fact that this data was available was thanks to additional storage capacity Inmarsat had incorporated during its ground network upgrade in 2013. This, in turn, was a direct result of the company's involvement in the search for Air France 447 flight in 2009, where 229 people lost their lives. While Inmarsat was not directly involved in this investigation, the company took steps to store more data fields with the thought that this information could prove valuable in the future.



To put into context how important these numbers are, the area being searched for MH370 is 60,000 square kilometers. Without the data, the search area could be, in theory, 100 million square kilometers. While this does not necessarily mean that physical evidence for the fate of MH370 will be found, it certainly narrows the odds.



The available data points to a location in the Southern Indian Ocean. The analysis techniques have been refined and extensively validated and the search area is determined by the region of the highest probability. The work of the investigation team has been to determine this probability distribution in order to optimize the search effort, however, it cannot provide an 'X marks the spot' type of solution.

In those crucial first days after March 18, Inmarsat realized it had some really important information. Its engineers had seen something that had deserved investigation and decided to take a much closer look. In the next couple of days they were able to connect some of the dots and apply a "bootstrapping" approach to the data and came up with the northern and southern routes. What was critical about Inmarsat's information was that it countered the general view of where the aircraft might actually be and that, in fact, MH370 had been flying a lot longer than people had initially thought.

It is common sense to begin a search from the position of the last confirmed contact. The data from the terminal they had was indicating that the aircraft was flying far longer than originally realized and that its flight path was far removed from the initial search area. In such circumstances, you go into a mode where you try and ignore what is going on externally and just focus on examining and analyzing the data. If you look at what was going on externally, you have the potential to be somewhat blinded by it and be a rabbit in headlights.

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Inmarsat were very focused, ensuring that their data was correct and there was a lot of double and triple checking at the time however, the technology has certain limits. Although a region can be defined, it doesn't provide a GPS-like position.



Now, more than 12 months have passed and the mystery of what happened to Malaysia Airlines flight 370 remains unsolved — and there is a chance it may never be solved. The underwater search continues and there is a feeling of “cautious optimism” that the plane will be found. The world of aviation communication is going to change over the next 10 years; we will see far more communication throughout the aircraft for both crew and passengers. Most wide-body aircraft already carry an Inmarsat terminal and suggestions have been made to the industry on how to enhance reporting functions.



While helping with the ongoing investigation and hoping for a satisfactory outcome, Inmarsat's work, in many ways, is done. If MH370 is ever found, a few satellite engineers who go about their daily jobs with precision and daily excellence will have played a key role. Working long hours and overcoming the loss of a key team member, they worked to help provide answers from the data.

9/11 – 2001.

The following is an amazing story from a flight attendant on Delta Flight 15, written following 9-11:



On the morning of Tuesday, the 11th September 2001, we were about 5 hours out of Frankfurt, flying over the North Atlantic....



All of a sudden the curtains parted and I was told to go to the cockpit, immediately, to see the captain. As soon as I got there I noticed that the crew had that "All Business" look on their faces. The captain handed me a printed message. It was from Delta's main office in Atlanta and simply read, "All airways over the Continental United States are closed to commercial air traffic. Land ASAP at the nearest airport. Advise your destination."

No one said a word about what this could mean. We knew it was a serious situation and we needed to find terra firma quickly. The captain determined that the nearest airport was 400 miles behind us in Gander, New Foundland.

He requested approval for a route change from the Canadian traffic controller and approval was granted immediately -- no questions asked. We found out later, of course, why there was no hesitation in approving our request.

While the flight crew prepared the aircraft for landing, another message arrived from Atlanta telling us about some terrorist activity in the New York area. A few minutes later word came in about the hijackings.



We decided to LIE to the passengers while we were still in the air. We told them the plane had a simple instrument problem and that we needed to land at the nearest airport in Gander, New Foundland, to have it checked out.

We promised to give more information after landing in Gander...

There was much grumbling among the passengers, but that's nothing new! Forty minutes later, we landed in Gander. Local time at Gander was 12:30 PM! There were already about 20 other aircraft on the ground from all over the world that had taken this detour on their way to the U.S.

After we parked on the ramp, the captain made the following announcement: "Ladies and gentlemen, you must be wondering if all these aircraft around us have the same instrument problem as we have. The reality is that we are here for another reason." Then he went on to explain the little bit we knew about the situation in the U.S. There were loud gasps and stares of disbelief. The captain informed passengers that Ground control in Gander told us to stay put.

The Canadian Government was in charge of our situation and no one was allowed to get off the aircraft and no one on the ground was allowed to come near any of the aircraft. Only airport police would come around periodically, look us over and go on to the next aircraft. In the next hour or so more planes landed and Gander ended up with 53 aircraft from all over the world, 27 of which were U.S. commercial jets.



Meanwhile, bits of news started to come in over the aircraft radio and for the first time we learned that aircraft were flown into the World Trade Centre in New York and into the Pentagon in DC. People were trying to use their cell phones, but were unable to connect due to a different cell system in Canada. Some did get through, but were only able to get to the Canadian operator who would tell them that the lines to the U.S. were either blocked or jammed.

Sometime in the evening the news filtered to us that the World Trade Centre buildings had collapsed and that a fourth hijacking had resulted in a crash. By now the passengers were emotionally and physically exhausted, not to mention frightened, but everyone stayed amazingly calm. We had only to look out the window at the 52 other stranded aircraft to realize that we were not the only ones in this predicament.



We had been told earlier that they would be allowing people off the planes one plane at a time. At 6 PM, (about 6 hours after we landed) Gander airport told us that our turn to deplane would be 11 am the next morning. Passengers were not happy, but they simply resigned themselves to this news without much noise and started to prepare themselves to spend the night on the aircraft.

Gander had promised us medical attention, if needed, water, and lavatory servicing. And they were true to their word. Fortunately we had no medical situations to worry about. We did have a young lady who was 33 weeks into her pregnancy. We took REALLY good care of her. The night passed without incident despite the uncomfortable sleeping arrangements.



About 10:30 on the morning of the 12th a convoy of school buses showed up. We got off the plane and were taken to the terminal where we went through Immigration and Customs and then had to register with the Red Cross.

After that we (the crew) were separated from the passengers and were taken in vans to a small hotel. We had no idea where our passengers were going. We learned from the Red Cross that the town of Gander has a population of 10,400 people and they had about 10,500 passengers to take care of from all the aircraft that were forced into Gander ! We were told to just relax at the hotel and we would be contacted when the U.S. airports opened again, but not to expect that call for a while.



We found out the total scope of the terror back home only after getting to our hotel and turning on the TV, 24 hours after it all started.

Meanwhile, we had lots of time on our hands and found that the people of Gander were extremely friendly. They started calling us the "plane people." We enjoyed their hospitality, explored the town of Gander and ended up having a pretty good time.

Two days later, we got that call and were taken back to the Gander airport. Back on the plane, we were reunited with the passengers and found out what they had been doing for the past two days. What we found out was incredible.

Gander and all the surrounding communities (within about a 75 kilometre radius) had closed all high schools, meeting halls, lodges, and any other large gathering places. They converted all these facilities to mass lodging areas for all the stranded travellers. Some had cots set up, some had mats with sleeping bags and pillows set up.

ALL the high school students were required to volunteer their time to take care of the "guests." Our 218 passengers ended up in a town called Lewisporte, about 45 kilometres from Gander where they were put up in a high school. If any women wanted to be in a women-only facility,



that was arranged. Families were kept together. All the elderly passengers were taken to private homes.

Remember that young pregnant lady? She was put up in a private home right across the street from a 24-hour Urgent Care facility. There was a dentist on call and both male and female nurses remained with the crowd for the duration.

Phone calls and e-mails to the U.S. and around the world were available to everyone once a day. During the day, passengers were offered "Excursion" trips. Some people went on boat cruises of the lakes and harbors. Some went for hikes in the local forests. Local bakeries stayed open to make fresh bread for the guests.

Food was prepared by all the residents and brought to the schools. People were driven to restaurants of their choice and offered wonderful meals. Everyone was given tokens for local laundry mats to wash their clothes, since luggage was still on the aircraft. In other words, every single need was met for those stranded travellers.



Passengers were crying while telling us these stories. Finally, when they were told that U.S. airports had reopened, they were delivered to the airport right on time and without a single passenger missing or late. The local Red Cross had all the information about the whereabouts of each and every passenger and knew which plane they needed to be on and when all the planes were leaving. They coordinated everything beautifully.



It was absolutely incredible.

When passengers came on board, it was like they had been on a cruise. Everyone knew each other by name. They were swapping stories of their stay, impressing each other with who had the better time. Our flight back to Atlanta looked like a chartered party flight. The crew just stayed out of their way. It was mind-boggling.



Passengers had totally bonded and were calling each other by their first names, exchanging phone numbers, addresses, and email addresses.

And then a very unusual thing happened.

One of our passengers approached me and asked if he could make an announcement over the PA system. We never, ever allow that. But this time was different. I said "of course" and handed him the mike. He picked up the PA and reminded everyone about what they had just gone through in the last few days. He reminded them of the hospitality they had received at the hands of total strangers. He continued by saying that he would like to do something in return for the good folks of Lewisporte.

He said he was going to set up a Trust Fund under the name of DELTA 15 (our flight number). The purpose of the trust fund is to provide college scholarships for the high school students of Lewisporte. He asked for donations of any amount from his fellow travellers. When the paper with donations got back to us with the amounts, names, phone numbers and addresses, the total was for more than \$14,000!

The gentleman, a MD from Virginia, promised to match the donations and to start the administrative work on the scholarship. He also said that he would forward this proposal to Delta Corporate and ask them to donate as well. As I write this account, the trust fund is at more than \$1.5 million and has assisted 134 students in college education.

In spite of all the rotten things we see going on in today's world this story confirms that there are still a lot of good people in the world and when things get bad, they will come forward.