

The Holy Encounter by Gayle Meadows

Some of my most memorable lessons sneak in through the back door, and often follow my ego attacks.

In 1982, I accompanied my husband, LeRoy, on a business trip to Milwaukee. Our children were small and I was uncomfortable with the idea of leaving them for a week. We had a nice time, but I was more than ready to get home by the time the week was over.

As we boarded the plane for the flight home, I was feeling anxious and grumpy and looking forward to sleeping all the way. I was assigned the middle seat between LeRoy in the aisle seat and an elderly man in the window seat. Given my unsociable frame of mind, I hoped that the old guy would keep to himself.

Much to my dismay, LeRoy struck up a conversation with the gentleman, whose name was Sid. I tried to offer polite smiles, but they didn't come naturally and I think I finally just gave up. Sid was visiting Tucson to be with his daughter and her family. The talk focused mainly on all the places he had traveled, his retirement from accounting, the type of airplane we were in. As they bounced their small talk back and forth past me, I grew more and more agitated. Why couldn't LeRoy just quit being so friendly, and give my misery some company?

The hostess served our drinks, and I moved past the agitation and into guilt. I excused myself and made my way down the long corridor to the restroom, chastising myself all the way. I hung out in the restroom for as long as seemed acceptable, taking deep breaths and trying to get centered. Suddenly the whole scene seemed rather funny. Here I was, hiding in this tiny airplane restroom from my friendly husband and a sweet old stranger. I flushed my bad mood down the toilet, feeling relieved and a little silly.

By the time I got back to my seat, the talk had migrated to the topic of children and family. I gladly joined in and found the last few minutes of the flight very enjoyable.

As the plane touched down at the Tucson airport, Sid said, "I want to tell you.....my wife and I were married 53 years and traveled all over the world together. She died three months ago and this is the first trip I've taken without her. I was very nervous about it, but you made the trip so pleasant – thank you so much." His eyes glistened with tears.

Had it been up to me, Sid would have spent his first flight without his wife alone and lonely. If not for LeRoy, I would have missed that beautiful holy encounter. That lesson is still so fresh in my mind. How many holy encounters have I missed since then? I wonder.

“When you meet anyone, remember it is a holy encounter. ...Do not leave anyone without giving salvation to him and receiving it yourself.”

[T-8.III.4: 1,7]