

A Trip I'll Never Forget:

The Woman I Met on My Flight Back to School

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It was summer of 2021 in the Florida Keys, and I was staying at my parents vacation house soaking up the sun as Cheryl Crow would say. I had the gift of one week off in mid March for Spring break, and as many young college students planned their week full of parties at the beach with tequila sunrises, I had planned mine to hangout with my family and not use as much brain power as possible to rest from the crazy busy school semester. You could say I was definitely ecstatic for the warm weather and to get away from the numbing cold in Columbus, Ohio.

For the past almost year, I've spent time here and there visiting my parents at their second home in Summerland Key and I definitely cannot complain. Living on an island is truly something else. The weather is usually at a perfect 90 degrees, the suns out, the water is crystal green blue, and the locals are usually pretty laid back. However, living on an island really gets to you after a certain amount of time and makes you crave the energy of a crazed shopping mall the week before Christmas. But for a week or two, it's definitely nice to get away from people. Growing up, it was always my dad's dream to live in the keys since he loved fishing. And if you didn't already know, the Keys was a fisherman's paradise.

There really wasn't much I spent my time doing, which is why I wouldn't recommend an extended stay there. Most of what ate up my vacation days was laying out in the sun, going on boat rides hoping to see some wild Dolphins jumping out of the water, eating out, and being humored by all the drunk people making stupid decisions in downtown Key West. My brother,

T.J., was actually one of those drunk people that made my trip a bit more interesting. He was coincidentally celebrating his twenty-first birthday with my Uncle Scott and cousin Scotty. A lot of Scotts, yes. Anyway.. No I did not get drunk with him, but I did stand tall as the good almost two years older sister that I am and hung out for a few hours in his early journey of celebration. Once he had his fair share of drinks I knew that was my cue, since I wasn't necessarily excited to watch any sort of puke and rally ceremony. Don't worry, I was always a phone call away if he needed me. With having said that, my trip was nearing its end after a weekend spent and I was eager to get back to real life, but also sad to have to say goodbye to my parents, good ole Kim and Todd, again. What I also wasn't excited for was my flight that is scheduled to leave at 8 a.m. tomorrow. Waking up at the buttcrack of dawn really isn't my specialty, but I will make ends meet if I have to.

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My alarm went off at 6:00 am, I quickly swung my arm out from under the sheets and patted the nightstand trying to find it without opening my eyes to stop the pain. *I need to wake up. I need to wake up. 5 more minutes then i'll get up.* Ten minutes later my mom walks into my room to make sure I'm up and getting ready. I was in fact not up and getting ready. Another ten minutes go by, I finally find the strength to get out of bed. Thankfully my suitcase was pretty much packed, so all that was left was getting dressed and putting makeup on. Today, I decided I didn't need makeup and that I was beautiful without it considering the limited time left until we needed to leave. I slipped on a pair of black leggings, a white printed t-shirt, a blue jean jacket, and a pair of white socks with green rubber slides. Airport fit was a solid 6, but it was comfort over fashion for me.

Once we were ready to head to the airport, we loaded my luggage in the car after carrying it down the staircase which started at the top of the front porch and ended next to the driveway. The staircase is a nice feature, just not when you're lugging a 40 pound suitcase up and down it. Most homes in the Keys usually had them due to being made on stilts since it floods so easily here, and not to mention the annual hurricane scare.

The drive to Key West, where I'm flying out of, is about 40 minutes from our house. My half-awake self mostly stared out the window, taking one last long look at the ocean as the sun slowly arose. The calm glass of the ocean followed me all the way to the airport, since the roads are mostly just bridges that stretch over the ocean, connecting all the keys together. As I sat there trying to comprehend us all saying goodbye soon, I realized I didn't eat anything before we left. "I'm sure it'll be fine" I told myself. Not only that, but I was incredibly tired from not getting enough sleep last night. Just one of the many perks of being a night owl.

Pulling up to the airport, I watched the few number of people there getting out of their vehicles and saying goodbye to their loved ones or to the taxi driver. The sunrise was at its peak as its rays shot over the ocean and turned the sky into a rainbow of color melting into the water. You could tell the sun was awake because the temperature was quickly rising and soon the brisk morning would be gone. It was mesmerizing and only made me want to stay longer, but I knew I couldn't chicken out of this. My dad hopped out of the car and opened the trunk to get my suitcase for me, while my mom and I got out and waited for me to get all my things together.

"Let us know when you're through security!" My mom said.

"I will don't worry" I replied.

This was the hard part for us. We all try to act tuff and as if saying goodbye isn't the hardest thing we always have to do, but it really is for us. Right now, I'm living two and a half

hours away from them and its been like this for 2 years, so saying goodbye doesn't mean "see you at home!", it really means I hope I get to see you as soon as possible.

I held my tears back as I walked away from my parents and into the airport to check in. In fact, I started rushing to the check-in because I was actually on a time crunch and was praying to God that I still had time to check my bag in. *Please God do not let me miss the cut off. Please please make sure I can get my bags checked in ughh.* I struggled to catch my breath as I took huge gulps of air, at the same time preceded to tell the woman at the booth why the heck I was freaking out in the first place.

"Hi I am flying to Columbus, Ohio today and I have one bag to check-in and I really hope I still have time!!!" I panted.

"Well calm down ma'am let's see what it says. Looks like you have 1-minute left to check your bag in so you just made the cut off!"

"Wow are you serious? That's wild!"

"Yeah it sounds like a lesson learned, I definitely wouldn't try to do that again."

"Oh of course, thank you so much for being able to still check it in." I was relieved, but also in shock at how good the timing of my arrival was.

Once I finished checking in and paid for my bag, I walked over to security and waited in line. Flying out of small airports was always nice when going through TSA, because you usually don't have to wait long. It can vary on whether or not it will be busy here though, since it's the only airport on the island, but it's still way faster than most. After getting through security and being told over and over to remove my shoes, take out my electronics, and to not move a literal muscle while standing in the body scanner, I made it out alive with no issues. As I was walking to my gate though, I started to feel off.

Maybe it was anxiety? Or something I ate? But there was no time once I got to my gate. I needed to go to the bathroom to make sure I wasn't actually in for something unpleasant. My stomach definitely did not love me right now for God knows why. After using the bathroom and hopefully releasing whatever anxiety decided to come along for the ride, I went and bought a water. The gates were filled to the brim with people. Over 100 vacationers were crammed into one main room with limited seating and were forced to get creative with where to wait for their flight. It was suffocating to say the least. A few people sat outside the main gate area and waited in the hallway where there were some benches. Others, well, they had to get comfy on the floor or stand. I walked around trying to figure out what to do and if I could get lucky and find at least one seat.

My heart jumped when I saw an open seat near my gate next to an older woman, probably in her 60's, who appeared to be by herself as well. For some reason, I was nervous to ask if I could sit there, as if she wasn't aware of the seat epidemic in the room. I knew I couldn't let my fears control me now, so I spoke up, "Excuse me ma'am, do you mind if I sit here?" Pointing to the chair next to her. She looked over and nodded, "Yeah you can", and to my surprise she didn't seem too excited that I asked. Once I sat down, I took another look at her and immediately had this strange thought that somehow, some way, I was going to know this woman. Call me crazy, but I started brainstorming how exactly I would get to talk to her again. Would we sit next to each other on the plane maybe? Or what if she starts talking to me again and complains about all the people in the room or... I don't know! All I know is for some reason I am going to know this woman and I want to know how.

The nervousness inside me was still there brewing its plan to declare war on me, so I put my AirPods in and played music to distract myself from the fact that I was going to be 40,000 feet in

the air soon. Normally, I have no problem flying as I have been a frequent flyer since I was in diapers. In fact, at this point I should have some sort of metal, badge, or plaque for flying as many flights as I have without any episodes of the plane crashing. However, for some reason, this time it felt like what I'd imagine a first time flyer would feel like. After waiting awhile and getting used to being buried in this crowd, I started to feel a tad better. All that peace got thrown in the trash though once they started boarding my flight.

Pulling my ticket up on my phone, I looked for my group number and waited for them to call it. "Group 4 you may now board your flight. Group 5"— *oh crap that's my cue*. I got up and headed over to the boarding door trying to keep my cool. "You are okay. There's nothing to be nervous about", I reminded myself. I walked onto the plane and kept my eyes peeled for my seat. Thankfully, there was no one in my row yet so I could skip the awkward small talk of "Hi, I'm in the seat next to you" aka, "Please move so I can sit down, thanks" since I was in the window seat. A few minutes later, someone sat in the seat next to me. "Hey, how are you?" I looked over to see who it was, and a young man not far off from my age was sitting there. Shoot, he was cute. But here we go, the small awkward talk, except the little girl inside me was screaming because it was a cute guy trying to talk to me. *ACT COOL SAM. DO NOT BLOW THIS.*

"Hello, I'm good how are you?" I responded.

"I'm good thanks!" He said.

I turned my gaze back to the window to watch the crowd boarding and focused on mentally preparing myself for this flight. Sitting in the very back of the plane was not my cup of tea, but I shouldn't complain, it can't be that much of a difference. Moments pass and the gentlemen speaks up again.

"If I start screaming on this flight just ignore me," He said.

I was immediately caught off guard by his response. “Do you not fly often?”

“No I do,” He said sarcastically, “How about you?”

“Yeah I do all the time” I confidently responded.

I should have known he was kidding! What am I even saying... He’s a grown man. I would sure hope he knows what flying on a plane is like, but I figured I’d give him the benefit of the doubt. After about 30 minutes of waiting for everyone to board and get seated, the pilots cleared us for departure.

At this point, I was mostly worried about what McDreamy was going to say next to me and to rid myself of this flying anxiety once we were in the air. As we started taking off, I gripped the armrest and kept my eyes glued to the window as the plane sped faster and faster, watching the wing of the plane slowly lift off the ground and into the air. The higher we got, the more I started to see the colors of the ocean surrounding the island. It was possibly the most beautiful scenery one can get leaving an airport. Again, the gentlemen next to me decided to speak up, and this time interrupting my peaceful watch of the islands.

“Beautiful view isn’t it?” He asked.

I turned to look at him for a split second and saw he’d been smiling at me.

“Yes it is,” I smiled back.

I started to take notice of how high up we were, but in a way that did not make me feel safe. I started to feel lightheaded and dizzy, and the fear that I could fall from the sky at any given moment took over me. Nausea vigorously ran through my body and there was only minutes to act before something was going to happen. The realization hit me, this feeling was one I’ve dealt with before. I was going to pass out. The strength in my body was depleting by the second. I had maybe two minutes before my body would decide to shut off the light switch in my head. *Think*

Sam, what can you do. I looked up and saw the blue flight attendant call button that looked like it had a hostess holding a tray on it with a cup of coffee. *That's it. Press the button Sam.* Using the strength I had left, I reached up and pressed the blue button for the first time in my life.

A minute or two passed and one of the flight attendants walked up to our row. It was a young African American woman with brown hair and a navy uniform. She looked puzzled as to why I hit the call button when we were still gaining altitude. "Hello, what can I help you with?" She asked me. "Hi, I'm going to pass out" I quickly answered. Then that's when I watched the lights go out. Immediately, I fell back into my chair as my body went limp and my legs stretched out under the seat in front of me. For a second, I was still partially conscious and heard McDreamy next to me get up out of his seat to move and quietly shout "I hope you feel better!" as the flight attendants cleared the opening to get to me. Then from that point, I couldn't tell you how long I was out for. A few minutes maybe?

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Slowly opening my eyes, I looked around the room and tried to remember the last things I had done before it all went blank. That's when it hit me, the nausea. There was no around but the encompassing feeling that I needed to throw up or be knocked out so that I could relieve myself of the excruciating motion sickness I was feeling. Everyone sitting around me acted as if nothing had happened, or they were just too scared to make a scene. The flight attendants soon realized I had woken up and the woman I first talked to came up to me asking me questions as to what may have caused this.

"Did you consume any alcohol today or yesterday?" She asked me.

“No, I didn’t”

“Did you drink at all while you were on your trip?” She pressed.

“No, barely. I had one drink four days ago and that was it I swear.” I responded.

“Did you eat anything before getting on your flight?”

“No, I haven’t really eaten anything at all today and I haven’t gotten much sleep”

“Oh my gosh, that’s exactly why you passed out! You have to eat and get a good nights rest before you get on a flight!” She angrily shouted.

I felt so bad, but at the same time I knew there was nothing I could do at this point. She walked away and came back with a few wet paper towels to put on my head to help with the sickness, and even gave me a few snacks to eat. The flight attendant was pissed though. I closed my eyes and tried to not look out the window anymore since that definitely made me want to puke, even though there was nothing in me to puke up. *Please God, please help me.* Unfortunately, this was not some dream of mine. I was in fact, stuck on a plane for two and a half more hours like this and there was no getting off it. Perfect. *Thank you God that time is limited and this has to come to an end soon.* I felt like I died and came back to life. My body was shaking, my eyes couldn’t focus, and every time I tried to take a bite of the apple sauce or a granola bar they gave me it just ramped up the nausea even more. The only thing that helped was if I sat there with my eyes closed and didn’t move. So that’s exactly what I did.

While I laid there feeling like I had just lost at a drinking game, I felt someone touch my hand without warning. Opening my eyes, I saw a woman standing there that seemed to of notice the scene I was making in the back of the plane. She had grabbed my hand and was holding it for some unknown reason. Her face was oddly familiar. You’ve got to be kidding, it was the lady I sat next to at my gate back in the airport. She then saw that I was awake and began talking to

me. "I'm just taking your pulse, what happened to you sweetie?" She asked. Immediately I began crying. It was the first time I had been asked by someone what had happened to me, which meant I finally had to talk about it and realize even more that this was real. "I, I passed out while we were taking off," I cried. She had explained that she was a nurse and wanted to make sure I was okay and assured me that she would come back to check up on me. I couldn't believe it. This woman was like a guardian angel sent from God himself.

After about 20-30 minutes, my body started to calm down and I actually didn't feel so bad anymore and was able to eat my snacks finally. Never would I of told you that airplane snacks were worth it, but right now they were gold to me. I ate almost everything they gave me like it was my last meal on earth. For a good hour or so I hung out and listened to music off my phone like any other flight, still avoiding the window I used to love so much. The hot flashes of nausea and dizziness were practically gone and it felt like the worst of it was over thankfully.

The captain of the plane then came on the speakers and announced that they were going to start our decent and we would be landing in Charlotte, NC soon. Just another great reminder that this was my connecting flight and I'll somehow have to endure another flight once we all get off this joyride. As we starting to descend though, another team of armies began fighting inside me. Ones with actual ammo. Another flight attendant was making her way down the aisle with a trash bag, collecting any remaining scraps and stopped to check on me. "Are you still doing okay?" She asked. The queasiness rushed back again and this time there was something in my system to eject. I had no time to respond and immediately felt the cheap airplane snacks resurface. My hand immediately covered my mouth before matters got worse and the woman handed me the trash bag. There was no time to waste, I removed the mask I was wearing and let the ammo out.

A few minutes later, the flight attendant came back to see if I was finished and took the trash bag away. Relief rolled through my body this time at least, but the ride wasn't over until we touched the ground. About 25 minutes pass and we finally landed. The flight attendants had called the airport ahead of time and requested a medical team to wait for me at the gate. Once we docked the plane and opened the door, they ordered everyone to stay in their seats so that they could get me off the plane first. I unbuckled my seat belt and realized I was gunna need all the brain power I could get to walk off this plane. Step by step I followed the aisle down and didn't take my eyes off my feet for fear that my legs would collapse under me. Once I reached the door of the plane, the medical team greeted me with a wheel chair to sit in. They rolled me inside the airport and stopped at the medical car that carried all their supplies. One of the EMT men greeted me and began asking me basic information questions about myself. He asked what had happened and I explained everything through my chattering teeth as I sat there shaking in shock of everything. Looking around, I wondered if I would ever see the woman on the plane again. Hundreds of people surrounded me so I assumed there was no way to point her out in this crowd.

All of a sudden, I felt a hand on the back of my shoulder. My eyes lit up when I saw that it was the woman. Again, the tears came as she hugged me while I sobbed in her chest. They told me I was probably anemic, which for some reason made me lose it even more. They all assured me I would be fine, and I knew it too I just hated the situation I was in. One of the airline workers also bombarded my little social gathering and asked me if I wanted to change my flight to a later time, since I was scheduled to get back on the same plane in less than an hour. "No. I cannot get back on that same plane" I said horrified. He then told me he would take care of it and switch my flight for free. *Thank you Jesus. You really did help me.*

The medical team insisted they take me back into the boarding bridge for privacy to get an EKG on me as a precaution. The woman, who I found out was named Sandy, knew it was our time to depart ways. Sandy asked me if I had a Facebook so we could stay connected, and I happily replied “Yes I do!” and pulled out my phone to add her. I thanked her for everything and for not leaving me, then the medical team took me over to the bridge. Well, this was definitely awkward. Not everyday do you find yourself taking your shirt off in front of some rando’s at the airport. Of course, the EKG was normal. Once we got back into the main gate area, the airline worker came up and handed me a boarding pass for my new flight that would be taking off in two hours instead of 40 minutes. At least this way I could process my trauma and hopefully eat something that wouldn’t come back up again. On another positive note, they even provided me a chauffeur to wheel me around the airport. That was pretty rad. It wasn’t long until I was rolling around granny style sipping a strawberry-banana smoothie from Panera Bread living my best life again. This definitely was a trip I’ll never forget.

