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Recently, I traveled to Colorado for an ASID symposium. As is my custom, I eagerly anticipated my seatmates, or more accurately, my “new friends.” Yes, I know that a person like me might annoy you. But take heart. Southwest Airlines published an article on how to “politely” discourage in air conversation. They suggested that you simply introduce yourself and say, “My name is _____, and I hope you have a nice flight.” So you are safe with that approach, and someone like me would honor your intentions.

Trying to save ASID funds, I booked a ridiculous flight with 3 legs! First leg, the lady did NOT want to talk. Second leg, another lady did NOT want to talk. She even covered her head with her hoodie. Yes, I got the message and was disappointed. You see, I look at these “opportunities” as “appointments”, a chance to make a difference in the lives of others.

Third leg, I gave up and moved up to the very front row. A gentlemen and fellow “thru” passenger caught my eye, and asked if he could join me on the front row. “Are you kidding?? Well of course!” I answered. Poor thing didn’t know he was going to have to talk to me! He plopped a political book on the vacant seat between us, (my same persuasion), and we discussed politics briefly. Caskets came up in the conversation oddly enough. He said that he had some very recent experience with caskets.

For the next hours, this soft spoken, stocky man, with huge hands, and gray hair poured his heart out to a perfect stranger. You see, his son had recently died, at the tender age of 26. I’ve learned that it is actually good to ask about the loved ones that have been lost. So I asked his name and said, “For all the time we have left on this flight, please tell me all about Eric.” He obliged but only after catching his breath, clutching his hand over his heart, and struggling through a sea of falling tears. Strangely, he was not ashamed to let them fall, right there, on the front row of the Southwest Airlines plane. This precious child knew he was dying, and made preparations to the point of finishing his college team project early, so that the others would not get a bad grade. So young and yet so wise.

I reached over and held his hand saying, “I’m just so sorry.” He caught his breath and told me very specific ways his son was so wonderful. I tried to remember them all. I was so intent on listening that I don’t recall anything else about the flight, not a noise, not a crying child, the beverage service, nothing. Time flew. In fact, a fellow ASID member had boarded, walked right past me, and I did not even notice. “Yes!” I thought. I was supposed to be on THIS flight, on THIS day, for THIS man!

About 15 minutes before we landed, I asked his purpose for being in San Antonio. It was for business meetings, so I asked about his business. You'll never guess!!! His company fabricates custom metal vent hood covers, countertops, backsplashes, and lighting boxes for commercial kitchens including restaurants and schools. And of course I asked, "Do you know about ASID?" I quickly shared my "elevator" speech, and he seemed very impressed and interested. He showed me his incredible portfolio of work, and we exchanged cards, hugs, and emails. (http://www.newjac.com/master_air.asp)

Since then he has sent me volumes of beautiful photos of metal work, and has reached out to the local ASID chapter leaders in his state. They are in the process of joining ASID and I encouraged his participation in local and regional meetings. I also sent him a book called, "90 Minutes In Heaven", a true story about a car accident victim declared dead, and his description of heaven. He sent me a tender email briefly thanking me for the ASID connection, and thanking me at length for the book and how it encouraged his heart.