

Susan in 16E

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As I boarded the five and a half hour flight from Anchorage to Minneapolis/St. Paul at 9:30 pm, I thoroughly planned on smashing my pillow against the window as I slept the night away in seat 16F. Little did I know, God had other plans.

When I made it down the aisle toward my row I spotted an attractive woman about my age sitting in 16E, the center seat. I informed her that I was by the window. She smiled and politely stood up to allow me to squeeze by and get situated. As I was getting my bag properly stowed under my seat, she pulled out a handful of magazines, held out her hand and said with an exhaustive sigh, “Hi, I’m Susan. Sure wish I’d brought a book.”

Now, the ironic thing was, I was on my way to Florida for a speaking engagement and book signing for a book I’d published just a few months prior and just *happened* to have six of my books in the bag stowed under my seat. The book is a devotional of my life testimony about overcoming abuse with a power and freedom that can only come from the Lord.

As we were both settling in, shaking her hand, I asked her, “Do you live in Anchorage? Are you visiting or traveling?” She said, “I’ve lived here all my life. My mother lives on the hillside and is in the final stages of Pancreatic Cancer. I have been visiting with her. We live in Orlando now and I am headed home for a few months. I hope she makes it a bit longer so I can bring my children up here after school lets out and they can see her one more time.” She went on to tell me about Orlando and how much her family loves living there and enjoys the warm weather. Having lived in Florida myself enhanced our conversation and as we prepared for take off, ending the conversation, I said “I am so sorry to hear about your mom.”

As the overhead lights dimmed for take-off, I fluffed my small pillow against the window and got ready for a long flight hoping if I slept the trip would go quicker. Eyes shut, semi-relaxed I hear the voice of God in my head. “Give her a book.” “What! No, God. I don’t even know this woman. I am not going to give her a book.” (Besides, peeking over at her, she looked pretty content reading her “Hollywood-type” magazine). Eyes closed again, trying to sleep – again. I kept hearing “Give her a book!” I wrestled with God in this argument for several minutes, (He *always* wins by the way) when I glanced over and saw Susan drudgingly reading a Proactive ad (after all, she had 5 1/2 hours to kill and only a few magazines.) Giving in to God I leaned over and said, “Catching up on all the Hollywood gossip?” Gosh, I wish I had a good book.” she reiterated rolling her eyes. “Ok, God, I get the point. You don’t have to hit me with a club.” I thought to myself. Reaching into my bag I pulled out a book and handed it to her. “I have a book you may want to read. It’s short enough you could probably finish it before we land in Minnesota.”

Reading the title, *God, are You listening?* she said, “Thanks. Boy, haven’t we all asked that question before?” She flipped the book over to read the back and I said, “You may

recognize the author, except right now my hair is up” as I pointed to my photo. She looked at the photo and then said, “You wrote this? How exciting.” As she opened the cover to begin reading, I smiled at her and resumed my uncomfortable head-cocked, upright sleeping position against the window.

The night grew quiet and dark and many sleepy heads were off to dreamland as hours seemed like minutes when the Captain announced we were about ten minutes from landing in the twin cities. Foggy-headed and dreary-eyed, I rose, looked over at Susan. She was still reading. She looked at me and said, “I am afraid I won’t get to finish before we land. I only have a few more pages left but I really have to go to the bathroom.” “It’s okay,” I said. “Go to the bathroom and I’ll tell you how it ends if I need to but I’m sure you’ll be fine.” Tapping the groggy gentleman next to her, she proceeded down the aisle.

Upon her return just moments later, she picked up the book and continued where she left off. At the very moment the Captain turned off the fasten seat belts and the doors were opened, Susan turned the last page. God’s timing was perfect...imagine that! As passengers gathered their sleeping children and overhead luggage, Susan and I sat for a moment in what, for me, was an uncomfortable silence. I did not know what to say at that time and did not want to put her on the spot. The awkwardness passed quickly and she leaned over to me, with misty held back tears in her eyes and gave me a huge one-armed hug and said a sweet, sincere, “Thank you. It has been so difficult for me with my mother dying and living so far away. But your story reminded me that God is with me through it all. He hears me cry out to him. Thank you so much for sharing the book with me.” “You’re very welcome,” I said, “I will keep you and your family in my prayers.”

It’s amazing to me how I thought God couldn’t use me (except for the book signing and speaking engagement). I mean the book is called *God, are You listening?* and God was probably saying Michelle, are YOU listening?? I, in my ignorance, argued with God thinking this woman couldn’t use my book. After all, it was for people who had suffered some kind of abuse. But like I said earlier, God had other plans. He used that book to minister, comfort and touch Susan that night in a profound way and she left her mother and that flight feeling encouraged, enlightened and closer to her Lord.

Susan, wherever you are today, thank you, for assisting the Lord in hitting me over the head, that I might be His vessel and you might feel his loving arms around you.

~ c. michelle bryant is a freelance writer and the author of the devotional book God, are You listening?