

Delays Plus One Hour and Five-Minutes

January 18, 2019

Delta Gate B1 Waiting

A gray-haired woman wrapped in an oversized woven shawl showing much wear at the fringe approaches me. Before she opens her mouth, I back away one giant step at a time from her dominating presence. Her hovering shadow beams down obscuring a sunlit room, and sucks the air out of it. There's something about her.

She confidently thrusts out her liver-spotted hand and introduces herself as the president of a Rochester women's peace and justice organization. Skeptically, she crooks her head to a right angle and stares right at me. She asks why she doesn't know me. When I explain that I don't live in the city and where I do live, she shrieks out, so the entire Delta lounge area and beyond in the Rochester International Airport goes on alert. Heads turn. Conversations stop in mid-sentence.

Insulting my small rural town in the heart of redneck country - I'll leave out the town's identity so as not to draw the kindly citizens into this tirade - and the remote possibility that I am genuinely a progressive thinker among the herd, is merely impossible. How I could consider associating with such vermin is more than she can fathom. The gray-haired activist eyes me disdainfully. Before I can explain that not all things are as they seem, she stomps off to her side of the waiting area like she is practicing self-distancing from contagion. The gray-haired lady had not asked a question without presuming to answer it as well.

It's the way life goes these days. You condition yourself for being rather generic in your conversations friend and stranger alike.

With numerous weather delays due to snow showers in New York City airspace, there is extra time at the Rochester terminal. I notice my fellow travelers - a female

middle-age crowd I estimate - sticking around impatiently in the lounge area and annoying the desk attendant with umpteenth questions that will not get straight answers. The business folks wisely saunter to the one bar and wait it out.

Tomorrow I will be marching in New York City with my daughter and her yoga group for the greater good of all women's issues. My brief encounter with the gray-haired woman empowers me even further that I am doing what my heart tells me, and in my way, not hers.

While my daughter is home for the holidays, I mention to her that I would like to come to New York City for the woman's march in January. She and I are snuggled under a microfiber cream coverlet on the couch in a rare bonding time in person. She looks up at me and says that she is not surprised in the least. She recalls how I stood up for paid maternity leave for teachers in the school district back in the seventies, and her mom became someone her friends admired.

Even earlier, I share with her another milestone that she was unaware of at the time. As a four - year old at my cousin's Boston apartment in the late 60s, she was seated on the worn cloth couch with me when I picked up the first edition of *Ms. Magazine* from the coffee table. It was if a lightbulb went off when I glanced through the topics - balancing work and home, single motherhood, feminism. I was a restless stay-at-home mom who had put her teaching career on hold to fulfill my obligation as a proper wife. Sooner than later, I made significant changes in my life -divorce, career opportunities - and kept in the forefront of social issues affecting women.

We are both under the impression that the League of Women Voters is the group sponsoring the New York City march, and I send in online my annual dues for participation. We aren't anticipating controversy is brewing.

Generations must join together and allow the younger ones to see that their mothers and grandmothers have been on the forefront for years. It's not a new philosophy, and as much as youth want to believe they target original causes, that's not the case.

1:03 pm Loading

The male flight attendant greets each passenger as they board the commuter flight to La Guardia Airport, and asks their destination. It is his programmed generic question, and he is smooth in his delivery. It will be his last flight of the day, and

he is anxious to get back home to Queens. Earlier his live-in partner had sent him a video of their preschool daughter who had just had an emergency visit to the doctor for a finger injury at daycare.

Initially, I don't pay any attention to his welcome, and then I realize that there is a slight window of opportunity. I take advantage that no one is right behind me, and I stop in the doorway of the plane. I tell him that I am off to New York to participate in the Women's March. Perhaps, this isn't on his radar, and that reflects in his reply. *Why?* He gives me a puzzled stare. I look at him directly in the eyes. *Why not?*

If later he takes a moment to mull over my rhetorical question, then he might think through why other women behind me in line are also on the same mission. Maybe not.

1:23 Wheels-Up

The gray-haired woman and a couple of others in her entourage settle in after shoving duffel bags into the overhead compartment. She turns around and immediately engages me in how this particular 2019 march has its controversy. The New York City League of Women Voters is struggling with its image - an anti-Semitic white, older women's group - while a splinter march takes a stand on immigration and justice in another part of the city.

We banter back and forth. The gray-haired lady has her mind made up and dismisses my marching choice. The march at Union Square will suit her friends and her better. We couldn't even settle on sharing a taxi into Manhattan, let alone which was the "true" march.

1:40 In Flight

Once the pilot signals the okay, the flight attendant knows that he has to focus on immediate needs. Women. Causes. Issues. He doesn't have more than cursory time for them. He has a short thirty-five minutes period to pass out bottled water and prepackaged snacks, clean up and prepare for arrival.

The wafer-thin woman seated next to me overhears my remarks to the gray-haired lady. She chooses not to get involved and rolls her eyes, letting me know that she is on the same wavelength. Of course, it happens all the time when I travel that there is a personal connection. In this case, my seatmate formerly taught in the

Rochester City Schools with a close friend of mine that we both highly admire as a lifelong educational union leader. She thought our mutual friend would be right beside us if she were ten years younger.

2:08 pm Landing

The gray-haired lady, my wafer-thin seatmate, and I all head off the plane searching for ground transportation while the male flight attendant quickly texts his little daughter that he will be home soon.

The minute that I arrive at my daughter's apartment, she is second-guessing herself if we have made a wise decision to go with the League's march. She read several opinion pieces, and she has concluded that we should look beyond divisive wedges between women and concentrate on making our statements.

January 19, 2019

Epilogue

On a brisk Manhattan winter morning thrilled that I was dodging another mega-storm in Western New York, I march proudly for women worldwide. For my retired Rochester teacher union friend. For friends unable to attend. For my husband. Yes, for the gray-haired woman. That's why.

After the march, several of us in our multiage group debrief over lunch. One of my daughter's friends has back issues, and she slumps in her seat tired from the walk. A couple of others are heading on to shopping in the area for the afternoon. My daughter and I look at each other briefly. We did it, and together, too. We choose to rewind our way Downtown.

