

When I walked onto the airplane that night in San Fran I was tired and slightly discouraged. I was in danger of losing my sense of humor. My heart and mind were heavy with an impending decision that I felt like I had to make. The week before I had been visiting my oldest son and seriously contemplating a move out of the country. That possibility wasn't sitting right with me but I felt I was running out of options because of the corner my airline company was painting me into professionally and financially. The slightly uneasy feeling emanating from my gut was magnified when around my son. Why? I made a decision when he was two that I have regretted and wished for a "do over" since I made it.

When he was two, I allowed him to be adopted by a man that I didn't know. A man that I didn't take time to know that would ultimately prove to be a negative influence and role model for him. The man who called himself my son's father turned out to be an abusive alcoholic. I was young, selfish and self centered when I made that decision. I thought at the time that he would need someone who was present in his life all the time instead of a sometimes "Disneyland Dad". What I didn't think about was how much a little boy would want his Dad. How much he would want his real father in his life even if it wasn't very often. I did it. And then immediately began to punish myself for it. Luckily I got the gift of him back in my life at the age of 9 when his mother finally got the courage to leave this man that called himself his father. And even luckier for me, my son forgave me.

So what did the past have to do with the present? I was scheduled for an interview and a possible job 8000 miles away from my three younger children. I was feeling like I was about to repeat history. I was feeling like I had to make a decision whether to desert my children again for a professional promise. Maybe desert is too strong a word. I was struggling with once again being far away from children who would not understand why their Daddy wasn't there to tuck them in and walk them home from school. Who wouldn't be there to kiss their hurts and hug them goodbye on a regular basis. I was trying to justify this decision by telling myself it was the best for me and whatever was best for me would be best for my children. That I could have worked out the logistics of visits. But I would have been wrong. Very wrong....again.

As I settled into my seat and the space around it, I was greeted by my fellow New York airline friends. And then I happened to look back and see you. And I stopped for a few seconds. Those seconds seem to take longer in times when all of a person's senses come alive at once. When the sights and smells and sounds take on added intensity. All of my senses were sparkling with internal electricity. My first thought was "what an extremely attractive woman". There was something different about you. You glanced up at me and shyly smiled, just a little. And my heart became a little lighter than it had been when I walked onto the airplane. I felt a connection. I felt like you really saw me. I noticed your hair and in those instances where a brain processes things at seeming light speed I noticed your lips. I thought to myself how wonderful it might be to kiss them. And then you looked away. I started breathing again sat down and thought. OK, now what? Did

you want to meet me? Were you merely being polite to a stranger? I didn't want to appear too forward if it was just a smile and nothing else. I didn't want to overstep boundaries that might have embarrassed us both. But I wanted to see if the smile might be given again. So I made excuses to myself to go to the forward galley of the airplane and make small talk with my co-workers. And to take quick glances at seat 2B to see if the smile would be given again. And it was. When I walked back to sit down for take off I glanced back but you were engrossed in your book. And I wondered how I might break through the book to the woman reading it.

As our meals came and went I kept stealing glances at you. I felt like a kid peaking around the corner on Christmas morning to see if Santa Claus had really come. I asked one of the flight attendants to discretely see if you were married. I told them I was interested in you. Peg took on the mission of match maker whole heartedly. You walked past me and then back again. You finally came to me and I was touched by that gesture. It was very brave of you to do and I admired you for it. I said hello and felt like I was greeting an old friend.

Our conversation flowed easily from subject to subject. We went through some of the logistics of our lives. We talked about your job as a CEO. And what you had already accomplished in your life. It was hard for me not to be a little intimidated by it. I wondered if someone like you could be interested in someone like me. And then I remembered that I was simply talking to an intelligent beautiful woman with a well spring of gentleness, humor and kindness.

The flight went quickly and soon it was time to say our goodbyes. I walked you to baggage claim in order to spend just a few more minutes with you. I gave you a quick peck on the cheek and we said our goodbyes but not before promising to see each other again if possible. As I walked away, I wondered if I would really see you. I know that sometime the forced intimacy of an airplane makes people say and want things that change when they reemerge into the noisy, busy world. But I smiled to myself because it had been so enjoyable to talk to someone who I felt challenged by. Who in a short few hours made me expand my personal comfort "box" a little? And I thanked you.

As I drove home on that cold winter night I broke the first rule of dating and called you to tell you that I wanted to see you again. And to hear in your voice whether you were serious about seeing me too. And I heard it.

Two nights later I got to see you again. When I walked into your hotel room, I was once again transformed into a nervous bumbling high schooler on his first date. But you looked so good. And beautiful and sexy again. The conversation came easily as before. And the minutes turned into a couple of hours. And I was sitting with my friend again laughing and talking. And it made me glad.

When we went to the bar, you told me you had to tell me something. I knew it was important and that it was a risk for you. As you shared your experience, I could feel your pain, your fear. And I knew that you were unsure of my reaction. As you told me, I felt

the quiet dignity that is part of you, the longing. I knew that what you experienced, what you endured makes you more woman, more feminine, more beautiful and even sexier to me.

I enjoyed watching your interactions with the people around you. I saw the kindness, the politeness of who you are. Each person was touched in a positive and loving way and walked away from you feeling good. Valentine's Day is all about gift giving. But what you may or may not realize is that you give gifts by simply being you. You give them to the world around you with your interactions and you dote on the people you love and you've given me a gift by coming into my life. Thank you.

These are the thoughts I have for you and about you on this Valentine's Day. The first chapter of this book called us is being written. I look forward to enjoying the pages as they come.