



## Publisher's Pen

Dear Readers,

Strangers. What *is* it about strangers?

We meet in the most ordinary of circumstances. Or not ordinary at all.

A fleeting moment in line at the grocery store. We exchange greetings – perhaps share advice on the use of a condiment or food we're purchasing.

Or comment on a headline on the cover of a “gossip” magazine.

We open a door for a young mother pushing a stroller – a woman with arms laden with packages – a senior walking with the aid of a cane.

Recently, at the airport boarding area awaiting my flight home from New York, I am seated and working away on my laptop when I am paged by the gate agent. “Hope Ozer, please come to Gate 21.”

Hmmm. I have my boarding pass. What could this be about?

“Will you be here for a while?” I ask the lady seated across from me.

A stranger.

“Yes,” she responds.

“Would you mind watching my luggage while I see what they want?”

“Not at all.”

Watch my luggage? I have just entrusted a total stranger to watch my luggage? In this day and age when we teach our children about stranger danger and the evils of humankind?

I have never laid eyes on this person before in my life. Yet I trust

her to protect my personal belongings? Am I nuts?

Yup.

Not my laptop, however. My life-line. I take *that* puppy with me!

Issue solved, I return to my guarded luggage.

“Thank you.”

“You're very welcome.”

What is it about circumstances such as this that we will enlist a stranger to safeguard and protect our “stuff”? Someone with whom we have not exchanged even the basic pleasantries. Names? Nothing.

I turn my head to the woman to my right.

“How bizarre was that? I asked a total stranger to guard my bags and didn't consider for a second that that may not be a good idea.”

We enter into conversation. The four of us. Me. The lady to my right. The lady across (the luggage watcher). The lady next to her.

All strangers.

But for the moment – “friends” and a support team!

“To The Right Of Me Lady” says, “There's something you can tell about a person – they just ‘look’ honest.” She had a slight foreign accent that I couldn't place.

“Lady Next To Her” comments, “Most people – I'd say 95% – are good people. But we're all predisposed in our world to think otherwise.” Sounded like she was from the South.

“Lady Across” nods.

For a moment we are connected.

Boarding for my flight is announced.

“Have a safe flight,” I wish each of them as I gather my belongings and head for the jet way.

They respond in kind.

We go our separate ways – probably to never see each other again.

My day is richer for this encounter.

On board, a flight attendant asks, “Are you traveling on business?”

“No. I was just here visiting my granddaughter.”

“You're a grandmother?”

“Oh yes I am, and it's amazing!”

Satisfying.

I reflect on what I have experienced. Do we overdo our wariness of strangers? Do we pass up the opportunities in life to make *our* lives – and others richer?

Do we overdo the “beware of strangers and other living things” mindset?

Is our world far safer than we are inclined to believe?

I don't know.

What I *do* know is that this sure felt good.

As we celebrate the Independence of our great country, might we be reminded of the inalienable freedom that we hold – these times that we cross paths with others – bond for an instant – and move on

– are ours to *choose*. We are allowed by an unchallengeable right to speak freely with strangers if we so desire. That we may form bonds no matter how brief or long lasting. That we can *choose* to choose with whom we relate and with whom we don't. We are Americans. We are free. We are blessed.

May you embrace the brief encounters in your life – and may you find them as fulfilling as I have.

Happy Independence Day!

Warmest Regards,

Hope H. Ozer

Publisher

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