

Local Girl and More Divine Appointments

By Linda Vigil - Feeney

I belong to an organization called Airline Ambassadors. As an ambassador, I escort children coming to the United States for medical care that their families cannot afford or is not available in their home countries. The nice thing about the program is that I can fit it around my work schedule. This year, I have had the opportunity to escort two children.

My first escort was a 2 year old Honduran boy named "Ani". He was on his way back to Honduras after several months in the U.S. for evaluation and treatment of a club foot. My responsibility was to fly with him from St. Louis to Miami. Another escort would accompany him from Miami to Honduras. However, there were a few hitches in our travels. The first being security in St. Louis. Ani wore a metal brace on his leg that set the alarm off. The TSA officer decided it might be in his best interest to use the security wand to clear Ani and get us through security. I think he realized that it would eliminate the possibility of watching me begin to cry! That was a smart move on his part because Ani was the calm one!

Our flight from St. Louis to Miami went off as planned. Ani slept the whole way. Once in Miami he was ready to go. Big mistake was when I took him out of his stroller and off he went. He was like flash lightening. He can't walk yet, so he is an expert crawler. I chased him around for about 15 minutes and then threw in the towel! Fortunately for me, the other escorts and children on their way to Honduras had arrived. Ani would continue on with them. I would return to Chicago.

Before handing him off, I thought I should change him and then my duties would be completed. I rushed into the restroom to begin the task at hand. As I was changing him, I looked around and wondered why there were urinals in the lady's restroom. At that moment, a man walked in and stopped in his tracks. You guessed it....Men's Room! We quickly finished our business.

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little pal over to the escort who would take him on to Honduras. Off I went back to Chicago! Mission accomplished!

My second escort was with Amman, an 8 year old Jordanian boy. This time we were going from St. Louis to Dallas. Another escort would take him from Dallas to Paris and a third escort from Paris to Jordan. Whew! In St. Louis, Amman stayed with a host family who knew him well from previous visits. He was a delightful and charming young boy. It was evident that his host family cared deeply

for him and they found it difficult to see him go. They were sending him back to Jordan with lots of pictures to share with his family and friends. His job on the flight back to Jordan was to put the pictures into his photo album.

Only one problem with this escort and it was a big one. The flight was oversold and I didn't have a seat! However, a perk with my job is that I am able to sit on the extra flight attendant jumpseat if it is available. Here is where we come to the divine appointment. A pilot going to work was assigned the seat next to Amman. When he realized that I was on the jumpseat, he offered to take the extra pilot jumpseat and give me his seat right next to Amman. TA DA!! This was an awesome and sincerely appreciated gesture. Amman was now able to share his host family pictures with me and beat me at every card game we played!

In Dallas, we met the escort taking Amman to Paris. Just like me, she quickly connected with this enchanting young man. With a quick hug and high five, we said our goodbyes. Mission accomplished and once again my life changed due to these incredible children and the kindness of strangers.

When I reflect on all the people involved with these children who travel hundreds of miles for treatment, I am awed. From the families who send their children for treatment with so much trust and faith in the goodness of strangers, to the hospitals and medical staff, the host families, and the organizations who provide the travel arrangements and escorts to make the children feel safe and secure.

The blessing for me is the opportunity to get involved with so many special people. I am certainly the lucky one!

God Bless!