

Cutler Bay

OCTOBER 4 - 17, 2011

SERVING SOUTH DADE

Chance meeting on a plane: What will happen to Sean?

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I shouldn't really bother myself with this. Sean is a 7-year-old boy who happened to be my seatmate on a recent flight to Boston.

My traveling companion as always chose the aisle seat so I was stuck in the middle and prayed as passengers were coming down the aisle, that the 400-pound guy headed my way was not going to be my seatmate and take over my armrest and then some.

No, I was lucky, as a grandmother traveling with her two grandchildren, one of whom was Sean, placed him in the seat next to me. They were from Guatemala and were speaking Spanish so I asked if he spoke English. He did, and did, and did. My wife kept asking me to not engage him in conversation so that she could read. It was too late.

Sean saw me as the universal grandpa and began asking me a gazillion questions. He first advised me that he usually gets sick on airplanes. Great! Then he wanted to know how high we were, how high would we get, would we be above the sun, etc, etc.

Well, I am used to being asked a lot of questions by kids, both from my three grandkids and the many school sessions that I attend, but this somehow was different.

I asked a few questions of my own like where were his dad and grandpa. He said that his dad was in Hawaii and that he had never seen him and that he didn't have a grandpa. I immediately decided to fill both rolls as long as we were seatmates.

I gave him a brief course on our solar system, explained how planes fly and lots of other stuff. Then I decided that perhaps I might do a little reading of my own. Sean asked, "How long will you be reading?" That broke my heart. I asked him if he could read. He replied that he liked to but that he had no books. He said that his 13-year-old sister seated in front of us had some but would not let him read any. I asked her if that was the case and she shrugged her



shoulders.

At this point my wife was giving me the "look." In other words — just shut up and maybe he will stop talking. Telling a politician to shut up is like trying to get a free snack on a commercial flight. Fuggedaboutit!

I couldn't help thinking about my three grandkids and the tons of books and toys that they have including my 8-year-old grandson's new tablet computer. Here was this adorable little boy with no one to answer all his questions and no books to read, and I wondered just how many more are there like him in the world.

At that age kids are like sponges...thirsty for information and willing to absorb as much as you can throw at them. What a waste to have all these empty sponges around when we all have so much. In my visits to our local schools, I learned that the major complaint of teachers is total lack of

parental involvement. These are kids living in a country that offers them free schooling and the parents don't care enough to drop by the school, talk to a teacher and see what else they as parents can do to help their children along.

In my pitch for charter schools in our town, one of the big advantages in my mind was that some of them make it a requirement that parents involve themselves with the school in some fashion at least one day per month. When I sent out emails about this, one parent complained that they were just too busy to spend that much time with the school. What a shame!

My wife eventually got her reading done but I am still wondering about Sean's future. That is me, always worrying about things that I have no control over. Good luck, Sean.