

# The Purse

## Preface:

The Holy Spirit brings people into your life for a reason, and this is one of those stories. A story about a chance encounter of two strangers; one departing without knowing what happened; and one departing with a lifestyle change; and neither knowing the name of the other.

## The Purse

Most men, if they've been married more than 30 minutes, know they are in a training program. Training a husband is just part of a woman's nature. Some women are exceptionally talented. They can train a man they don't know, and he won't realize it until the training is over. She was that type of woman.

I had been on a business trip for three months. The weeks of tractor testing in hot and dusty Arizona had been long and grueling. I was exhausted. I looked forward to trading the one hundred plus temperatures of Arizona for the cooler eighty-degree days of Iowa.

I had finished a long hot day of work with great satisfaction. Long hours and detailed planning allowed me to accomplish all the goals of the test plan. Still dusty and dirty I made my way to a hotel near the Phoenix airport. After a long hot shower, I crawled into bed about eleven. I had the early flight out of Phoenix. I wasn't looking forward to the 4 AM wake up call.

The obnoxious ring of the push button phone on the night stand jarred me awake. It couldn't be 4 AM but a look at the digital clock with a four and two zeros verified it was. I got dressed, made myself presentable, and called for a luggage cart. The bellhop loaded two suit cases weighing 75 pounds each, the limit back then, my computer bag, and my carry-on bag. Blurry eyed I made my way to the lobby. The next shuttle would leave in 25 minutes so I worked to stay awake.

During the shuttle ride to the airport terminal I visualized getting off the plane in Iowa and into the arms of my wife. At the ticket counter, I checked in but not without listening to the grumbling about my 75 pound bags. My safety shoes with metatarsal shields and steel toes were heavy. Ten days of heavy-duty Carr Hart work clothes added more weight. As usual, a couple of broken tractor parts in need of further analysis were packed in the bags.

By now I was hungry and looked for a food stand that had bagels. My sensitivities to various foods limited my airport breakfast menu to bagels. Food service was not going to be provided on the flight. I inhaled a couple of bagels and a diet coke. I hoped the flight was on time so I could grab a burger in St. Louis. After clearing security, an easy exercise in the '90s, I hiked to the end of the concourse. I found a chair and waited for the boarding call. I would lose two hours on the flight to St. Louis. Arizona did not observe daylight savings time. With temperatures over 100 degrees, they didn't need more hours of afternoon play time. It would be noon and dinner time when I got to St. Louis.

The boarding call came. I went down the ramp, and I settled into my window seat. As always, I immediately turned the overhead vent to full blast. Cold air crossed my nostrils. Flowing cool air allowed me to manage my motion sickness without Dramamine. A good flight is uneventful, and this was such a flight. I was glad to land in St. Louis. It was close to noon, time for dinner, and my stomach knew it. We were on the ground, but our arriving gate was not available. We waited and waited on the tarmac before proceeding to a gate. My thoughts of a burger were fast evaporating.

St. Louis was not my favorite airport. Typically it was stinky and dirty. Today would be no different. Murphy's Law was intact, and my arriving gate was at the end of the concourse. I began the long hike to the commuter terminal. I packed my twenty-pound computer bag, and my twenty-pound carry on bag toward the main terminal. At the main terminal I exited the secure area and checked my watch. There was no time for a burger, but home was an hour and a half away. I moved across the terminal to the security screening area for the commuter terminal. I was breathing and walking, so I cleared security without a hitch.

Packing my heavy bags I started the long hike down the corridor to the commuter terminal. About halfway there I caught a whiff of jet engine exhaust. A pungent odor I preferred not to inhale prior to a flight. The St. Louis commuter terminal was notorious for being filled with the stench of jet engine exhaust. The exit door for plane boarding was usually open for two reasons. Crews were constantly in and out of the door and it was a futile attempt at ventilation. The choices were jet engine exhaust or pungent body odor from the crowded terminal. What is it they say about the lesser of two evils?

I settled into a chair with my back to the wall, my preferred location for safety. I expected the boarding call at any minute. I was anxious to get home. I had visions of my wife's waiting arms. Then the dreaded announcement came. My flight had been delayed because the inbound crew was behind schedule. As usual, no other details were provided but we were asked to stay in the waiting area. Food service was not available in the commuter terminal. It was a long hike back to the main terminal. I was starting to feel hungry. The jet engine exhaust fumes went straight to my stomach, and I got hungrier and hungrier. I couldn't chance a trip to the main terminal and missing my flight. I was stuck in the waiting area with no food and nothing to drink.

I gazed around the room. Over the years, I had learned to people watch to help pass the time. Airports provide an enormous variety of people to be observed. As I scanned the room, I spotted her. She was about 30 feet across the room in a row of seats perpendicular to mine. She was seated in the end seat and facing to my left. Her medium sized purse was seated on the floor next to her. Her laptop computer bag was in the seat on her right. She was slender, tall, maybe six foot, and was an attractive woman.

The computer and her demeanor caused me to guess she was a successful and self-confident business woman. She was well dressed in a brown pinstriped pants suit with a white blouse. The pumps she wore on her long slender feet complemented her pants suit. I guessed the clothes came from an upscale department store. Her Brunette hair was straight and had a lot of body. It dropped just to the shoulder and curled in. This woman could have been the poster girl for the dressed-for-success business woman. I watched her, but she did not notice me. The gate agent announced the delay would be extended but to please not leave the gate area. My stomach was past being hungry. It was starting to make noises. It was asking for food. I was day dreaming and thinking of food. I am good at that. I like to eat. If I was lucky, the commuter flight might have peanuts and a coke. The more I thought about food; the hungrier I got. I was in a downward spiral. I scanned back to her, and then it happened.

She reached down for her purse, brought it her lap, and pulled the two sides apart to open it; not



unusual for a woman. But what happened next was the lesson. She peered into the purse and extracted a cherry tootsie pop; my absolute favorite flavor. She unwrapped it and put it in her mouth. My stomach commenced to talk in stereo. I'm thinking, "darn those women and their purses, they have all the breaks." Men just have pockets. Mine are full of specific stuff for doing test work. There is no room for tootsie pops.

I watched her enjoy the tootsie pop. I'm getting envious. I tried not to be too obvious, and she seemed unaware that she was being watched. The more I watched the more I salivated. My drool probably dripped on my shirt. I contemplated asking her if she had more tootsie pops in her purse. I'm a long time introvert and I couldn't bring myself to do it.

As she finished the cherry tootsie pop my stomach goes into convulsions. As she puts the tootsie pop stick in the disposal bin her flight was called. She picks up her purse and computer bag and gracefully walked to the entrance of the boarding tunnel. As I watched her disappear I'm setting there thinking, "you idiot, you're always in such a hurry and only think about test data. You could put tootsie pops in your computer case for emergencies like this." I resolved to make a change in my life. I would keep tootsie pops in my computer case. They would provide moisture and food value during extended stays in stinky airport terminals. Maybe I could make other people drool.

Eventually my flight was called. I got home and into the arms of my wife. I was tired, hungry, and drooling for a cherry tootsie pop. In a stinky commuter terminal in St. Louis this woman trained a man she didn't know. A man who was unaware he was being trained until it was over and his life would be changed forever. She was a talented woman.

It's been a couple of decades since that day and I'm now retired. Today, you will find tootsie pops in the armrest of my pickup truck. You never can tell when a little moisture and nourishment might be needed. I still wonder if she had more tootsie pops in that purse.