
B**Los Angeles Herald Examiner**Monday, May 15, 1989

**Connecting**Cathryn Ramin

**Skies still friendly
with kids in tow**

EVEN BEFORE I GOT in line, I knew there would be trouble. The woman was my age or a little younger. She was traveling with two small children and an extraordinary assortment of personal effects. She held the baby in her arms and pushed a stroller loaded with a diaper bag, a teddy bear and an overnight bag toward the American Airlines check-in counter. A little boy danced along behind her, pulling a large suitcase on wheels as if it was one of those rolling, squeaking, wobbling basset hound toys.

Stay away, an internal voice warned me. Get too close and you will ride all the way to New York in terrifying proximity to this menagerie. The ticket agent will feel compelled to seat you in the very center of the long row. The mother will nervously ask the little boy if he has to go pee-pee. He will say he doesn't know. He will climb over you every six minutes, just in case. The mother, fast becoming a total wreck, will ask if she can possibly leave the baby with you while she takes the boy to the lavatory. The baby will howl.

GET TOO CLOSE, I TOLD MYSELF, and you will convey endless glasses of apple juice and milk to this group. Some of them will spill. By the time you get off the plane, you will have crayon and little feet marks on your suit, you will have read books aloud, you will have done not a jot of work, and your head will pound.

I looked for an alternative check-in counter. There wasn't one.

I watched the little boy throw all his weight into pulling the suitcase. He'd worked up some momentum when he turned the corner. The bag fell on its side with a thud. He looked crestfallen. I helped him hoist his burden, which surely weighed more than he.

His mother turned around, smiled wryly and thanked me. I said it was no problem, and asked it what she was doing was as tough as it looked. They were going to visit her parents in New York, she told me. She and Daniel, her son, had flown together before, but this was the first time she'd traveled with the baby, who was almost four months old. Flying with one kid was hard, she said, but flying with two was damned near impossible.

HER HUSBAND HAD PLANNED to make the trip with them, she told me, but at the last minute, he was called away to London on business. She'd thought of canceling, but the tickets were already paid for, and non-refundable, and anyway she was worried about her father, who was too ill to travel and desperately wanted to see his new granddaughter. She decided to brave it. She'd been up since 5 a.m., she said. It was every bit as tough as it looked, she said, but if she had managed to travel around the world by herself a half-dozen times, she figured she could get two kids to New York.

She asked what was taking me East. My brother's wedding, I said. And business. She used to fly to New York on business once a month, she told me. In those days, she said, she abhorred people who took kids on airplanes; at the very least, she thought, there ought to be a special section for them. I suggested the cargo section. She laughed. By the way, she said, I'm Linda.

We reached the counter. The attendant said that the flight was full; the only seats left were in Row 25, in the center. Linda and I rolled our eyes. She tried to get her tickets out of her bags without relinquishing the baby. I'll take her, I said. I held out my arms. My own luggage, including the lap-top computer I never let out of my sight for a second, was somewhere behind me, forgotten.

As I held the baby, I understood that one day, I would substitute a diaper bag for the computer. On that day, the very sight of me would make passengers grimace and scurry in the opposite direction.

Introduce me to your teddy bear, I said to Daniel. ■