

How God Sent a Divine Airport Connection

Sweat drenched my back under a heavy winter coat; a weighty and oversized backpack hung on my back, a child was strapped on my front, and I tightly gripped a large suitcase. Amidst morning breath and a hint of coffee, a crowd of Ukrainians yelled furiously around me at the Lufthansa service window, where we all waited to be seen. The airport had become a madhouse.

Although I did not understand what the Lufthansa worker had announced in Russian, by the loud and exuberant responses from the Ukrainians, I knew it meant a delay in travel. I had been gone from my family for seven weeks. I had missed Christmas by three days. Emotionally, I was not sure I could do another hour, let alone another day.

To my far left, I noticed a Lufthansa worker who walked purposefully toward the service window. Somehow I managed to squeeze through the crowd while pulling hard on my suitcase and keeping a protective arm around Nina—who was in a trance—overwhelmed by the large crowds and the shouting.

“Excuse me!” I yelled toward the man. “Excuse me!”

The man acknowledged me and walked to meet me just a few feet away from the yelling crowd.

“Do you speak English?” I asked.

“Yes. How can I help you?” His English was polite and sounded well-practiced.

“Can you tell me what the announcement was?”

“The airport is closed.”

My knees felt like buckling, and panic threatened to overcome

me.

"What ... what do you mean the airport is closed?"

"Due to the snowstorm, the airport has been closed today."

"What about my flight to Frankfurt?" I demanded.

"Your flight has been cancelled since the plane was not able to arrive today. Maybe tomorrow you will have better luck." The man gave me a polite nod and turned toward the back door of the service desk.

"Wait!" I called after him. "What am I supposed to do?"

"You need to stand in line and wait for your turn so we can get you rescheduled for another flight."

I watched him walk away.

The sting of tears burned my eyes while I willed them to stay away. *Not now*, I thought. *I cannot lose it here.*

Like a film in slow motion, I watched as the mob continued their shouts of complaints. There were no lines, no order. It was survival of the fittest; whoever could push their way towards the window got served first. I was no stranger to crowds and pushing my way through—I was a tough girl raised in Mexico City—but I carried a child, a backpack and a suitcase. Worse, my emotional stability was already so depleted, I knew I would not be able to stand and fight the crowd.

I eyed a folding chair by the service window. I reached for the empty chair with my free hand and began dragging it toward the crowd of people. A man grabbed the chair and tried to pull it back to its empty corner.

"*Niet*," he said.

I was not going to lose my grip on the chair. "I am sorry. I did not realize this is your chair, but as you can see, I

could really use it for a little bit," I said to him.

"*Niet!*" He pulled again, and more Ukrainian words followed.

My legs were about to give out. I was emotionally spent. Sweat now dripped from my forehead and soaking my bangs.

"I need this chair," I begged.

"*Niet!*"

I was going to cry—to break down in the middle of the airport and sob uncontrollably. I could feel it coming, and I had to fight it.

"*Listen to me!*" I yelled so loud, people were now looking our direction. "I am taking this chair, and I am sitting on it. See this child I have here? She is disabled, and I am about to pass out, so let go of this chair right now because I am going to sit on it!"

The man let go, rolled his eyes at me and made a mocking gesture of surrender. As I turned toward the crowd, dragging my suitcase and the chair, people stared. I was the loud and crazy American throwing a scene. I didn't care.

I sat on my chair, as close to the service window as I could get it. I was shaking, and my lip trembled.

Okay, Lord, I prayed. I am about to break down here. I cannot do this, I cannot do this anymore. I have nothing to give. I am completely empty. I need You to step in and send me an angel. I need to know You have not abandoned me.

I could feel tears running down my cheeks as I looked up. People stared. They whispered and pointed. One woman stared so intently, I mumbled at her, "Please don't stare at me."

"Can you re-pit plis?" she asked.

"Never mind." I turned away from her, wiping a tear with the

back of my hand. I felt her hand on my shoulder.

“Plis, re-pit. What you sai?” she asked.

I stared at the woman.

“I help you,” she encouraged. “I no gud English, but I help you.”

“Don’t worry, I’m okay,” I said.

We looked at each other in awkward silence. It would have been natural for her to turn away from me. Instead, she kept looking at me. Finally, she pointed at Nina. “Tis your children?”

“Yes.”

“How old?”

“She is almost 4.”

“What her name?”

“Nina.”

“Nina! Beautiful name—Ukrainian! My name Svitlana.”

“Hello, Svitlana. I’m Ellen,” I said.

“Why you carry her like tis?” She asked pointing at my makeshift sling.

“She cannot walk. She has cerebral palsy.”

“Ah!” Svitlana looked at me with understanding, then gently patted Nina’s head. “You pretty girl. Nice girl.”

“She doesn’t understand you,” I said

“Oh,” the woman said. She smiled gently at Nina and patted her

head once more. I realized she had understood my statement to mean Nina had a mental delay.

"She only speaks Ukrainian, and I believe some Russian too," I added.

Svitlana looked at me, puzzled. "Tis not your children?"

"Yes. But I just adopted her."

"You adopt her? Tis child? Wif paralysis cerebral?"

"Yes."

Svitlana looked directly into my eyes. She gently nodded and stood tall, a hand placed on my shoulder once more. Because of my previous scene, people around us had been paying close attention to our exchange of words, so when Svitalana cleared her throat and began to speak to the people around us, they were listening. I knew she was speaking about me.

A man with a deep voice yelled out at me, "Tenk you." A young woman, her English crisp and lacking the strong Russian accent, approached us and offered help. Svitalana used the opportunity to have someone translate for her: "Thank you. This woman says you have taken one of our children despite her disability. We hide them in institutions. We do not take care of them. We are ashamed. But you have saved one of our own and loved them in a way we never could. Thank you."

A person next to the service window called to me. "Plis, plis, you come. You be first."

The crowd nodded in agreement and moved to the side to let me through. I slowly rose from my chair. Svitalana quickly grabbed my suitcase. "I help you," she said, nodding toward the service window.

Svitlana stayed by my side for two days. She fed Nina, she changed her diapers, she sang lullabies and she rocked her to sleep.

Once in Frankfurt, it was time to say goodbye to Svitlana. I clung to her in a tight embrace as we both cried into each other's arms.

"I know you will disappear as soon as I let go," I said to my new friend.

"Why dis-pir?"

"When I was sitting on that chair and you spoke to me, I had just prayed and asked God to send me an angel, and He sent you to me."

"I no angel, Ellen."

"Yes, yes, you are, my sweet friend. Yes, you are."

*Adapted from **Ellen Stumbo's** blog at . Ellen is a pastor's wife and she writes about finding beauty in brokenness with gritty honesty and openness. She is passionate about sharing the real—sometimes beautiful and sometimes ugly—aspects of faith, parenting, special needs, and adoption. She has been published in Focus on the Family, LifeWay, MomSense, Not Alone, and Mamapedia among others.*