

AIRPLANE RIDE TO ADULTHOOD

I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M DOING THIS, I THOUGHT LOOKING OUT THROUGH THE ROUND PLASTIC WINDOW. FROM A FEW THOUSAND FEET ABOVE THE GROUND, THE GREEN AND GOLD OF OREGON'S FIELDS BECAME A QUILT, EMBROIDERED BY A CREATIVE HAND. THE SKY ABOVE THE AIRPORT, AS WE TOOK OFF, HAD BEEN GLOOMY FOR JUNE; THE CLOUDS HUNG LIKE DISMAL RUMORS OF A RAINY DAY.

BUT I HAD, I THOUGHT, LIVED TOO LONG IN OREGON TO BE DAMPENED BY WET WEATHER. WITH DIFFICULTY, I SUPPRESSED THE URGE TO JUMP UP AND DOWN FOR JOY - THE JOY OF FLYING ALONE, PLAYING AT BEING A RESPONSIBLE ADULT AMONG THE OTHER ADULTS ON THE FLIGHT TO SAN FRANCISCO.

AS IT MATCHED MY MOOD, THE AIRPLANE ROSE, AND WE BLEW ABOVE THE CLOUDS. I SHALL NEVER FORGET THAT FELLING OF BEING SCREENED FROM THE EARTHBOUND WORLD WITH THE WHITE CLOUDS LIKE FLUFFY FROSTING ON AN ANGEL FOOD CAKE. THE SUN SHONE IN THROUGH THE WINDOW LIKE A WARM SMILE.

THE AIRLINE STEWARDESS ASKED ME IF I WANTED SOME SODA. ACCEPTING A GLASS OF SEVEN-UP, I REALIZED THAT THIS PLANE RIDE, FOR ALL I WAS ALONE, WAS NOT DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS I HAD TAKEN WITH MY FAMILY. I HAD BEEN AFRAID WHEN I FIRST HEARD THAT MY AUNT HAD INVITED ME TO SPEND THE WEEKEND WITH HER IN SAN FRANCISCO. I HAD REMEMBERED THE COMPLEXITY OF TICKETS, GATES, AND SUTCASES. NOW, SITTING IN THE PADDED BLUE SEAT OF THE AIRPLANE, I REALIZED HOW EASY IT IS TO FLY.

THE CLOUDS LAYER CLEARED GRADUALLY, BELOW US, AND THE BROWN HILLS OF CALIFORNIA STRETCHED BENEATH ME LIKE THE RIDGES AND VALLEYS OF A CHILD'S SANDBOX.

SOON, SAN FRANCISCO ITSELF ENTERED MY SIGHT. THE SEATBELT SIGN WAS ON, AND I SMILED AGAIN AT THE SIMPLICITY IF FLYING WAS AS EASY AS THIS... OR PERHAPS THE SMILE WAS FOR THE CITY ITSELF. IT LOOKS SO BEAUTIFUL FROM THE AIR! SOON I WOULD BE IN IT, SHARING THE THING MONEY AND IMAGINATION CAN CREATE.

THE AIRPLANE CIRCLED SEVERAL TIMES OVER THE BAY, AND I FELT A MOMENTARY TWINGE OF ANXIETY. THE LACK OF LAND BENEATH US REMINDED ME SUDDENLY OF THE LITTLE TALK THEY GIVE YOU ABOUT FLOATATION DEVICES. BUT THE AIRPORT IS ON THE BAY, AND BEFORE I KNEW IT, THE PAVEMENT WHIRLED BY UNDER OUR WHEELS.

I FEEL, AS I WALKED THROUGH THE BROWN CORRIDOR, THAT THIS FIRST PLANE TRIP WAS A RITE OF PASSAGE BETWEEN DEPENDANT CHILDHOOD AND TREATMENT AS A RESPONSIBLE, MATURE PERSON.