

# Social Distancing To and From China

Category: Contagion

written by Kurt Stange | March 15, 2020

On recent flights to and from China, I had two different experiences of isolation and contagion.

Flying over, I was upgraded to business class. Cocooned in our own little fully reclining enclaves, my isolated, entitled fellow travelers and I interacted only with the attendants solicitously serving us. It was self-indulgently pleasant, and with the help of melatonin and a hearty meal, I got seven hours of sleep and arrived feeling like the world should continue to cater to me.

On my return flight, I was in economy class, though I'd managed to snag a bulkhead seat. As I extended my legs and settled in for a vertical snooze, the lead flight attendant came up and started nodding and smiling at me. I nodded and smiled back. This went on for nearly a minute.

Finally, she said, "I guess you know why I'm here."

"I have no idea," I responded, but I was getting curious.

She looked surprised, but my face flashed honest ignorance.

"Well," she said, "you see those three holes in the bulkhead."

"Yes," I replied, "I was wondering about those."

"Those are for a bassinet." Then she steeled herself. "I've got champagne; I've got hard liquor; I've got wine and beer; I've got snacks..."

She paused, then started repeating the list.

I interrupted. "If you're asking me to move my seat so that someone doesn't have to have an infant in their lap for the next sixteen hours, just tell me where to go."

She looked surprised, then relaxed. "Well, there's one up ahead or one right behind you."

"I'll go behind," I said.

"Sorry," I apologized to the elderly couple behind me, knowing they were probably already anticipating how to use the extra space next to them.

"It's okay," they said. "We heard."

Over the next fifteen hours, an infant slept in the bassinet. Her mother snoozed, and the passengers in the area took turns entertaining her rambunctious two-year old. We relinquished our arm rests rather than staking

out our territory. We smiled at each other, rather than walling off. The flight attendants started hanging out with us. They brought extra snacks and drinks and joined us in partaking of them.

I arrived having gotten much less sleep than on the trip over, but I felt more connected with my fellow travelers, and my interactions once I was off the plane felt less entitled and more communal.

Love is more contagious than coronavirus. What we need now is not social distancing, but physical distancing –with social connectedness.

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