

## **A Soldier is A Soldier is A Soldier**

The flight from Seattle to Salt Lake was unusually packed and I was in a bad mood from the very beginning. I had arrived at SEATAC 2 hours in advanced, and I was placed into a line that wrapped around the entire airport just like an E ticket ride at Disneyland.

The guy in front of me was going back home to Oakland. He had been seeing his dying father and wanted to get back to his wife and kids. As it so happened, he was my age and had the same number of children as me. He was surprised to find out that I had chosen to be a father (just recently) so late in life. I responded by telling him about my daughter with a huge grin on my face. He listened politely, and when I was done he said that my love for her showed in my eyes, the manner of my speech and body language. "You really love your family, don't you?"

Yes, I thought. "I sure do. My wife and child are everything to me. Everything."

He begins to tell me about his own family. He is Irish born. Migrated here when he was 8 years old... that is how old I was when I came here from Argentina. He tells me he married his wife, a black woman, when he was fresh out of high school, and what his father's reaction had been. He was told he had two choices: a) get his father's support for college, or b) marry his black lover. The choice was easy for him: he married his fiancé, and she helped him to get through college. He and his father never spoke after this until this week. When he was married his mother attended the ceremony wearing a black funeral dress. His parents missed the birth of both of their children, birthdays, high school graduations, etc.

He explains to me the difficulties of his two boys growing up being biracial. Shunned by the white community and black community both. As he explains this to me I can see the intense love that this man has for his family. How every obstacle and distraction further strengthened the bonds between himself and his family - not allowing anything... nothing, to interfere with the joy of simply being together. The members of his family must be giants... huge people. I wish I could meet them.

Finally, the line comes to the x-ray machine. Ten seconds, and I am on the plane, where we are packed like sardines into an aluminum cigar tube with wings. Sure hope this thing flies well. So there I am. Sitting down by the window with my knees up into my chest, because they can fit more people into those planes if you have no legs. Why the window seat? You see, I figure if we fall out of the sky like a rock I don't want to miss anything.

So just my luck should have it, a soldier sits next to me. I am praying he doesn't ask me what I think about the war. Half way there. So far so good. He is quietly reading minding his own business. All of the sudden, he turns at me and says: "Nice shirt!" Pointing to my Thelemic Knights shirt. I thank him and notice he is wearing a small gold cross around his neck. I turn away to look out the window again. This seems to be working... or at least it did at the time. About 5 minutes pass and here comes the dreaded question:

"So... what do you think about this deal with Iraq?"

I take in a deep breath while my brain makes an attempt to construct some creatively bogus and neutral statement, when all of the sudden, out of my mouth come the words: "I think it is horrible that so many innocent people are going to die for the corporate self interests of the chimp in the White House and his cronies."

I am beside myself. Did I really just say that out loud? Judging by the look on the stewardess' face I am pretty certain that I did. The soldier next to me? "Yeah... me too. I hope all of us on both sides can all go back to living our lives before that monkey gets us all killed."

Did I just hear that correctly? Did this guy in uniform just insult his commander in chief?

The stewardess comes back around for the customary watering of sardines. I ask for a Sprite. My newly made soldier friend tells me to get Coca Cola. I don't understand. Is the US Army now endorsing Coca Cola? I nod and change my order of Coke. I begin to figure it all out when Lance (that is his name, by the way) takes a Snapple tea bottle out of the leg pockets on his fatigues and begins to pour Jack Daniels into my glass of coke. This guy is good... real good. I figure that after a gesture like that he deserves some conversation, and so I begin to tell him about my military career. Before you know it we are both drunk and laughing like old friends. We talk about the sorry life of the military man, the bad food, long hours and shitty pay... not to mention the unquestioning fidelity to the ideal of justice and honor and how the big eared monkey in the White House is ruining that for enlisted men and women everywhere. Then, things get really quiet. Uncomfortably so. I go back to staring out the window at the snow-covered mountains.

He begins part two of our conversation with the next most disastrous topic next to politics: religion. He is a Catholic and wants to know what is so great about Thelema that I would leave the Church for it. I give him the 30-minute version and we begin to land. Perfect one point landing. I thank him for the drink and he says, "I know why we do it."

"Do what?" I say.

"Become soldiers" he slurs.

Why do we do it, Lance?" I slur back expecting some funny joke or punch line.

"Because when we see the flag, it isn't enough to simply put our hand on our hearts. We get to salute."

He is right. That is precisely why we do it. For that one moment... that kiros where time stands still, and it is you and the egregore - those things that the flag is suppose to stand for. When one raises the visor on their helms to say: "Look at me. It is I." I am saddened by what the flag is beginning to represent. I feel a great loss.

He shakes my hand and I say to him in the most sincere manner that I can: "Watch your ass in Iraq, friend. And may Ra-Hoor-Khuit be at your right hand."

He says: "Thanks, and may Jehovah be at your left."

I think he got it. I know I did.

Gerald del Campo

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