

Pin on a Flight Attendant

On a recent trip to Dallas, Texas, to attend the symposium of the American Medical Directors Association, Brynna Nunnery, our corporate events coordinator, Joan Carter, wife of Life Care Director Mike Carter, and my wife, Lola, and I were on an American Eagle flight out of Chattanooga. Before and after liftoff, it became quite apparent that the flight attendant was someone who could be the model of that job description. She was cordial, highly efficient in the conduct of her responsibilities, and spoke clearly and distinctly the required information and other instructions over the public address system.

As she came down the aisle dispensing beverages, she displayed a personality that connected with her customers. As her cart drew nearer, our attention was drawn to a semi-circle of various colorful pins on her serving apron. Being naturally curious by nature (my wife calls it nose), I asked her, as she stopped to take our drink orders, what the pins represented. Properly, she responded, "There's a story about each one. After I finish serving, I'll come back and answer your question."

A short time later, she returned. The name on her badge was Barbara. She explained that she had undergone a career change in the year 2000. She had been an activities director for Good Samaritan Society until then. One of the residents in her charge was a retired American Airlines official, and he encouraged her to pursue a dream to become a flight attendant. And she did.

"You asked about these pins," she said. She pointed to one – a bronze emblem showing emergency personnel raising a flag over Ground Zero in the aftermath of 9-11.

"Shortly after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, a young man from a small town appeared on one of our flights. He was about 24 years old, and he had not been away from home much. In conversation, I learned that he was a fireman, and that he had volunteered to go to New York City to help with the recovery efforts. I guess the mother instinct in me took over, and I talked with him quite a bit, thanking him for what he was doing.

"When it came time for him to get off the plane, he handed me this pin, and asked me to wear it, and perhaps it would be a reminder for me to think about him occasionally, because he had a hard job ahead of him. I told him that I would. I proudly took the pin and put it on. When other people have asked about the pin, other pins and other stories followed."

(more)

What did her actions – and her story – say about Barbara? Among the conclusions:

- She is an encourager. No doubt that young man rode into Ground Zero with a stronger motivation for his mission because of Barbara.
- She is a good listener. Really listening to what people have to say is an art that is in jeopardy in a technological world of cell phones and computers. But it is one that feeds the human spirit.
- She is one who sees her job as more than moving people from one location to another; it is an opportunity to serve, to meet specific needs, and to do so in a profound way.
- She is an example of good customer service.

Those qualities are all-important in our business in Life Care, American Lifestyles and Life Care at Home. We can all take notes from Barbara.

--Beecher Hunter