

# **DON'T TAKE A NAP ON A PLANE**

**-Noelle Thackery**



The minute I got on the plane, I had my window shade pulled down, my coat folded under my cheek, and my eyes closed.

Some might think me a stuffy old scrooge for doing something as boring as napping while the world passing by outside was one 42, 000 feet above the Earth, but I've spent more time in planes than in cars. Trust me, the excitement wears off.

My mom works for the airlines. She's a Delta flight attendant, so we basically fly free. It's a good thing, to, because my dad has to travel a ton for his work. We don't really have a permanent home, just odd little apartments here and there, wherever my dad is working. We're all originally from Utah, though, in a little town called Murray. Compared to the clamor and glamor of big cities like Chicago, New York, and L.A., Murray's not much, but it's still my favorite place I've ever lived. The Coldstone across the street from my old junior high, the glass-windowed stores and shiny floors of the big mall, the grassy park where I like to watch all the different people running, jogging, laughing, talking. I like to guess their stories, who they were, what they were like.

We are flying back to Murray for Easter to see my dad's side of the family. I hope I can go to the mall with my cousins – I don't get to see a lot of other kids my age every day because of my lifestyle I do online school, which I admit is not for everyone. It works for me though, especially since it takes so much less time than in-person classes, leaving more time for exploring. I'm so good and getting around in big cities, I'm practically an adult. All I need is a few inches and my driver's license, and I'm set.

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The flight to the Salt Lake International Airport from Florida (where we have been for two months) is four hours, so I'm definitely taking a nap. This is another thing I am an expert at. It might seem an easy task, but getting comfortable on a plane is no laughing matter. You've got to wedge your elbows just so, lean at precisely the right angle to avoid a kinked neck, and fold your coat just right to make a passable pillow. Luckily, with me being an expert and all, I'm out before they even get to the safety procedures.

I woke with about twenty minutes to go when the baby behind me started wailing. I didn't mind, as I figured I should wake up anyway to avoid looking like I had just been roused from the dead when I got off the plane. Oof, how long had I been asleep? The plane looked all weird ... I rubbed my eyes again. And then again. What was I seeing?

The cabin felt all crunched up, and the walls had turned from a uniform white to an old-fashioned beige color. The seats were cushy and retro green, with a white towel neatly folded over the back. Stuff green curtains that matched the chair draped the square windows. And the people around me – that was the part that sent me reeling. The men were dressed in fine suits with neatly coiffed, short cut hair. The women had shiny, slicked back curls and bobs that rarely reached their shoulders and neatly-pressed and ironed starched dresses. As I craned around to get a better look at these cardboard cutouts from the 60s, I realized I realized that I too was done up in early 60s fashion. Red fabric speckled with white polka-dots crunched beneath my sweaty palms and a fancy white collar itched at my neck. My shoulders were adorned with puffy sleeves hemmed in a white ruffle. My feet were crunched up in blocky yellow heels. Gee, I was like a living Minnie Mouse! But the panic really set in when I reach up to touch my hair behind my ear. The ensuing small tap seemed to echo for miles when my fingers hit the hard, plastic exterior of my gelled up hair. I gasped and moved my hand to the back. Short curls harder than a Barbie doll's hair met my hand. A bare neck, where my beautiful, sweeping golden waves had once been. Horrified, I tried to catch my reflection in the window. It

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was like I was looking back at a Rosie the Riveter ad, minus the confidence. The confidence was definitely lacking.

I pulled myself away from the window and searched the plane for my parents. They were nowhere to be seen.

“What’s the matter, darling? Do you need something?” the woman next to me asked through a voluminous layer of plum lipstick. Gosh, it was like I was living in an old back-an-white film!

I glanced at her in horror and closed my eyes. Just a dream, just a dream, just a dream. I pinched myself and opened my eyes. I leapt back. The woman’s powdered nose was inches away from mine.

“Honey, are you sure you’re all right?”

Yes, yes, I’m fine, when we land?” I snapped. The woman drew back, offended. “Well, I never—”

“Spare me the crap, lady, just tell me when we land.” She gave me an even weirder look. Probably at my well-practice moody teenager tone.

“In just about fifteen minutes, I would suppose,” she replied coldly before turning her back to me.

“Like I care what you think. You’re probably dead in 2024,” I huffed under my breath. I smoothed out my skirt and tried to pull myself together. If this was a dream, I would have to just see it through until I woke up, and if it wasn’t a dream ... I’d tackle that problem when we got there.

To distract myself from my surroundings, I stared out the window. We were ten minutes from landing, but I still couldn’t see the city yet. We dropped

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ever lower, and the beautiful sweeping mountain ranges I knew, tipped with snow even a week before Easter, appeared. But where was the city? And then I saw it. A clump of tiny blocks that sprawled maybe a mile or two. No suburbs surrounding it, no sparkly glass windows catching the winking sun. No, it could be. But if it was 1960 up here...

As soon as the plane landed, I leapt out of my seat and shuffled out of the plane with the rest of the passengers as quickly as I could. To my surprise the terminal didn't look night-and-day different from the modern Salt Lake Airport. Of course, it was a lot smaller and cramped, with vintage touches – the terrazzo flooring, the grainy, retro ads plastered to the walls. And of course the people. Everyone was dressed in the classy fashion of the early 60s - snappy suits and tilted fedoras for the men, shiny blonde bouffants and elegant pencil skirts and blouses for the women. Stewardesses smartly dressed in streamlined baby blue dresses with matching pillbox hats perched above their slicked hair clacked importantly by in heels, dragging a small black suitcase by a white gloved hand. I guess I'd assumed that in the 60s, everything had a sort of yellowed sepia tint to it like in the movies. But of course, that was just how the film came out then. The real 60s were as full of color as modern times, just without enormous screens to broadcast the more garish neons.

I waited and watched the crowd of people streaming out the gate, searching every face, desperate to find a familiar one. When the last stewardess rolled out of the gate and the door was shut and locked behind her, my worst fears were validated – my parents were not here.

I was now almost completely certain that this was not a dream. It felt too real, too lifelike. My knees wobbled and I thought my legs might just give out and leave me in a 14-year-old puddle of stress and anxiety. But I managed to ignore the screaming sirens of panic in my head and be sensible. I was very good at getting around cities. I just needed to find my aunt and uncle. I peeked over my shoulder at the woman next to me's magazine. Plastered across the

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front page was a winking model and a bold title: “How to Keep Up with the Fashions of 1964.”

I was living in the Salt Lake of 1964! I guess Aunt Penny wouldn't have been born until 1986, and even Ggrandma Lilly is only about four years old right now! I shook my head at the sheer craziness of it all. I didn't really know my great grandparents, but I supposed if I looked them up somewhere I could find the family name. I just hoped they were still living in Murray back in 1961! I reached into my pocket to look up their name and I felt the worst wave of panic of the day. My phone was gone. Oh no. No. How was I gonna survive without my phone?! I admit, I began to hyperventilate just a little. How was I going to find my family, or anything at all without Google Maps? And if I did, how was I going to get there? I couldn't very well call an Uber. Did they even have public transport in 1964? My knees wobbled, and this time they actually gave out and I landed in a miserable heap on the floor, swaddled in the skirt of my polka-dot dress. After a few minutes, a stewardess approached me.

“Ma'am, are you all right?” she asked with concern.

I awkwardly picked myself up and smoothed my skirt. “Yeah, yea, I just, um, need to call someone.”

“You can use our phone, if you'd like,” she said pityingly.

“That'd be great! Uh, ma'am,” I said, catching myself.

She led me over to an old fashioned rotary phone at the booth. I had absolutely no idea how to use it.

“Um ...”

“Do you know the number you are calling?”

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“Erm, no.”

“That’s all right, we have a phone book you can use.”

The stewardess, with some effort, pulled out a thick old phone book and heaved it on the desk. Gosh, how did people function without the internet?

I flipped through the pages as quickly as possible, trying to find Johnson. Big surprise - there was about a whole page of Johnsons. I strained to remember name of my great grandma. Something like Beth, or Addy... Betty! I ran my finger down the rows of faded ink until I found Betty M. Johnson, with a dotted line leading to an address. I pointed to the number, praying the stewardess didn’t expect me to dial it myself. To my great relief, she clacked her crimson nails against the rotary expertly and held the phone out to me. After a few “brr’s,” a woman’s voice finally picked up. “Hello, Walter Johnson’s household.”

“um, can I speak to Betty Johnson, please?”

“This is she.”

“Um, okay, so I’m your granddaugh-I’m a distant relative of yours and I need a place to stay for a day or two,” I said abruptly. The woman’s staticy voice instantly switched from profession to motherly.

“a relative of mine? Well, we’d love to have you!”

My shoulders slumped as I let out a huge gasp of air.

“Oh, thank you so much,” I replied.

What’s your name, dear?”

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“Maggie Johnson.”

“I’m afraid I don’t remember you, although I’m sure I’ve met you before. Of course, Walter’s side of the family is simply colossal, I couldn’t hardly remember every cousin and distant niece. Let’s see, you must be Jane’s daughter, Hm? I’ve only met her once, but she seems a lovely woman. Or are you dear Caroline’s niece?”

“Uh, Caroline’s niece,” I answered cautiously.

“Oh what fun this is! Where shall we pick you up?”

“I’m at the Salt Lake airport.”

“Fancy that, flying in on an aeroplane! I’ll send Judith with the car straight away! Bye-bye now.”

She hung up, and I gave the phone back to the stewardess, still amazed that actually worked.

“Got everything straightened out, ma’am?” the stewardess asked.

“Yes, just perfect, thanks,” I said, smiling, and I grabbed the handle of my suitcase and steered my way towards the pickup area.

I had absolutely no idea what car I was looking for, especially since my mind was already occupied with the cars themselves. They were all boxy and flat, with big old headlights and coats of paint in pastel yellows, greens, and browns. The occasional expensive-looking red car would rocket past. I wrung the leather handle of my suitcase nervously as I waited. After what felt like hours, a flimsy looking faded yellow station wagon pulled up dangerously close to the curb, and out leapt a spunky seventeen year old girl, curls bounding

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around her face. Oh my gosh, it was my great aunt Judy! I recognized the uneven smile, the mischievous eyes, and the little corner dimple.

“Maggie Johnson!” she called. I grabbed my suitcase and tentatively scooted closer. Unfortunately, Judy spotted me right away and tackled me. Yep, this was my aunt Judy for sure. Even now she had her signature breath-crushing bear hug. “Oh, I’d a knew you were a Johnson girl from a mile away!” she roared, tugging my freckled cheek. This girl was born to be stereotypical aunt.

She began chattering in my ear at such speeds I couldn’t comprehend was she shoved me into the car backseat with two other girls. She got in on the driver’s side and introduced the two girls.

“That’s Addy Sue, and that little pumpkin there is lil’ old Lilly Silly.”

The older girl, who was maybe about 8 or 9 years old, swang her golden pigtails indignantly and huffed, “It’s just Addy!”

The toddler sitting in her lap stuck out her lip and huffed, “It’s just Addy!” in an adorable imitation of her big sister.

And then I realized that I was laughing at my grandma Lilly ! She was a baby right now! She stared inquisitively at me while sucking a finger. My proper old grandma, sucking her finger! That was wild. But before I could say anything, Judy stepped on the gas and I was slammed against the back of my seat. Lines did not seem to mean anything to Judy, for she swerved in and out and farther out. Judy blabbed on, occasionally turning around to talk to me, to which my response was a panicked, “Eyes on the road!” and Judy would respond with a “Righto.”

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When we finally swerved into the dirt driveway, I nearly leapt out and kissed the ground. Judy hopped out of the car and ran up to the door of a little yellow farmhouse, complete with a sagging porch and uneven window shades. I followed her, still struggling to walk in a straight line. A woman with dark brown curls close to her face opened the door. She resembled Judy closely, with a slightly straighter nose and smaller mouth. But that small mouth smiled just as big. She hugged me even more ferociously than Judy and shepherded me into the kitchen, which was a lovely little place. The walls were paneled oak, and so was the small five-person circular dining table and the cabinets. To my delight, the refrigerator and oven were turquoise. I looked around the cozy kitchen in wonder, wishing we had as wonderful a kitchen as this – perhaps updated with a blender, a toaster, and an air fryer.

Betty sat me down in one of the kitchen chairs and busily began preparing a snack. The other three girls filed in and sat down too. The laughing faces, the overlapping chatter, and the warm smiles on every face picked slowly away at the knot of fear in my chest until it just fell away. A genuine smile warmed my face like the buttery rays of sun streaming through the window, and I felt warm from the inside out.

As Betty set down plates of petite little sandwiches and mild for each of us, she said, “I do you hope will come with us to the park celebration, Maggie, dear. It would be such fun with you there!”

“Uh, celebration?” I asked.

“Why yes, the fortieth anniversary of Murray Park! There’s to be a big luncheon, complete with all sorts of spring festivities and such. Oh, the park is just lovely this time of year. You must come!”

“Oh, I dunno, I should really-“

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“Oh no, you must come, Maggie darling!” Judy cut in, her mouth full. “I’ve just these to entertain me, and sometime they are such a bore. I have a lovely dress you can borrow that’s two small to fit me anymore.”

“Don’t listen to Judy, she don’t know a thin,” Addy informed me. “We ain’t a bore, we’re perfectly excitin’ alright!”

“Use proper grammar, darling,” Betty reminded Addy.

“All right the,” Addy said She held up a hand to her eyes as if she was holding a monocle, puckering her lips like an old lady. “You simply must come to the event, for Judith is such a stuffy bore, I wouldn’t possibly know what to do with myself at such an event with her!”

Betty pressed her lips together disapprovingly and Judy took a gulp of milk to hide her smile. I stifled my own giggle with a bite of my sandwich.

“Now Addy, what Maggie must think of us! Sit up straight and finish your milk, or you won’t get to go to the park at all!” Betty scolded.

Addy gulped down her milk obediently. Betty whisked away our plates and sent us upstairs to get dressed for the celebration. Judy tugged me into her room, which was an overwhelming sight. Clothes, accessories, and tons of random junk littered the floor, the vanity, and the bedside table. The wallpaper wasn’t even visible due to the posters, magazine cutouts, and photographs plastered over every inch of the wall, most of which depicted a member of the Beatles. Judy went right to her closet and tossed out dress after dress in every color and pattern possible, finally emerging from the pile with a simple dress patterned with little green and purple flowers. I was more a sweatpants and hoodie girl, but I took the dress gratefully and went into the bathroom to change. Judy emerged from her room in a puffy sleeved yellow dress, giving a twirl for me to judge her out by.

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“Perfection!” I said, smiling. It was still so strange to seem my wrinkled great aunt as a teenager! Judy introduced me to her father, albeit my great grandfather, who they all called Pops, and she enlisted my help in doing up the little girls’ hair for the event. I pulled Lilly’s hair into two little pigtails, curling them around my finger. Again, it was so weird – I was tying my four-year-old grandmother’s hair up in pigtails right now!

As soon as everyone was ready, we piled into the back of Pops’ dusty pickup truck. I smoothed the pretty flowered skirt of my borrowed dress over my lap. A smile tickled at the corner of my mouth. Despite being far from home (60 years away) I was beginning to enjoy myself.

“Ready, kids?” Pops asked, turning around to look at the mismatched jumble of grinning faces in the back. A chorus of “yessir” answered his question.

He floored the gas, and off we bounced down the dirt road. The wind ruffled my chestnut locks, and I watched everything go by with curiosity, fascinated by this strange version of the Murray I knew. Uneven wood fences lined the road, behind which were quaint little farmhouses and farm buildings. Stands of oaks were clustered on the outskirts of the farms, and off in the distance, horses, cows, pigs, goats, and chickens sung discordantly in a wonderful kind of symphony.

Judy gave me a play-by-play of what I was seeing, with a few interruptions, comments, or corrections from Addy and Lilly.

“See, we don’t live quite in rural or suburban area here. Our neighborhood is just a long lane of smaller farms, see, and here are the suburbs where we go to school,” she said as we pulled onto a paved road lined with flat houses and juniper trees that looked somewhat modern except for small vintage touches, like the squat little cars in the driveway or bay windows protruding from the house.

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After a few more minutes of Judy chattering, we reached the park. It looked surprisingly similar to what it would in 60 years, although it was perhaps a bit smaller, and of course there were no modern playground structure, although there were a great many pavilions and little drinking fountains and such here and there. Towering oaks, junipers, willows, and other trees wound through the park in clumps, broken up by small swatches of grassy field or vibrant green hills. A small, rickety looking ferris wheel poked up out of the trees a few yards away, and several booths, streamers, and tents were set up. Women chatted in groups, gesturing with white gloves and smoothing their pastel skirts and dresses. Children frolicked in the grass or begged their parents for ice cream cones, they too dressed in colorful spring attire.

I hopped out of the truck along with the others and we started towards the festivities. We walked along a windy little path, the canopy of fluttering leaves overhead dappling my sunlit skin with shadows of the oval leaves. White Betty and Judy were busy wrangling the little ones, I strode off the path a little bit to a quiet little gazebo overlooking the creek. I stepped inside, sitting down on the bench and closing my eyes. It was so beautiful here. The soft chatter of the crowd and the leaves brushing in the wind ebbed gently in and out of my hearing. I only wish my parents were here to experience it. How would I ever find them? What if I never saw them again? I breathed in to calm myself, but the scent of the tulips around the gazebo only reminded me of my mom. I sighed. I could here someone calling my name. I would just have to figure this out later. I opened my eyes and strode out of the gazebo. Instantly, I felt a weird shift. The air seemed to change. The chatter seemed to come from a different direction. The breeze danced the other way. I looked out over the park, my eyebrows slightly furrowed.

Judy was setting out a picnic blanket a few yards away. But this time, the brown bobbed curls were white, and the yellow dress was an elegant lilac pantsuit, and petite little hat. But the twinkling eyes were the same. I looked down at my outfit, not believing it. I wore jeans and a t-shirt, and my feet were

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no longer in my chunky heels, but laced in the comfortable, worn canvas of my Converse. I squealed and ran down the hill in excitement, hugging first my parents, and then each cousin, aunt, and great aunt. “Whoa, whoa, there, junior, I’m the one who give the bear hugs ‘round here!” Judy said, squeezing me back. I grabbed one end of the picnic blanket and helped her lay it down on the spring grass. We sat down together and began to get out the food.

“I’m so glad y’all could get down here for the Centennial Celebration! You know, I was awful worried when I saw that news story about the plan comin’ to Salt Lake that just up and disappeared. Some loony government man was claiming it was a top-secret time machine being kept in the hangars out in Florida, and they mistakenly put passengers on it and sent em’ back to 1964! Ain’t that the craziest thing you every heard?”

“The craziest,” I agreed.