The Story about the Tattoo

Based on a conversation ...that really happened...on a plane.

By Karen Zacarías

(This is based on a real conversation I had on an airplane. Everything Wilma says was really said. The airline prices are an exaggeration (in some places). I can’t wait until the world is safe again and we can fly, and share food, and hear wild stories from strangers. Until then, fly in your mind...think of all the wacky wonderful different stories there are in the world...and savor them all - Love Karen Z).

SETTING: On a Low-Fare Airplane

CHARACTERS:

Taylor - A writer aged 25-45 (any gender)

Wilma- A beleaguered mother, aged 55-65

Jo or Joe- Wima’s child, aged 17 (any gender)

Flight Attendant- Any age, any gender.

Other Passenger- Any age, any gender
(On an airplane. Wilma and Jo/e are the last two passengers to get on. They are tired and stressed and dragging suitcases that don’t fit anywhere. TAYLOR is already sitting on an aisle seat).

WILMA

Joe, Joe...hurry.... Is this our row?

(TAYLOR removes earphone.)

TAYLOR

This is Row 32.

(TAYLOR puts them back on)

JO/E-

I am coming, Mom.

WILMA

Thirty two! We are sitting with you. We just ran across the airport. Almost missed this flight.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Ma’am....we really need you to sit down for a non-on time departure.

WILMA-

Kid...Can you jam the suitcase up there?

TAYLOR

- Um- I have, delicate...equipment up -

(JO/E heaves it up)

WILMA

Jam it , Jo/e!

JOE

It’s so heavy! What’s in it?

WILMA

Dirt, Jo/e. It’s just full of dirt.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

We can check it in for $35.00...But bringing it on costs $50.
What?

It costs to bring luggage?

That makes no sense...

I don’t make the rules.

This is absurd, we are travelling. That requires luggage.

Didn’t you read the fine print? And those two seats are each $25.

We have to pay for our seats?

I’m sorry. I don’t make the rules. But sit for now.

I’m sorry...I’m the middle seat and my teenager...

Please...go ahead.

You must be a writer! I see you are writing.

Yup.

Don’t worry, I won’t talk your ear off. It’s just... this has been so stressful.

I know...flying....
WILMA
We don’t do it often... Oh...I’m so sweaty...we didn’t get a chance to eat anything. Our connection was so late. Oh Goodness...I feel so overwhelmed.

TAYLOR
Here...I have an extra water. And a package of Oreos...

WILMA
I couldn’t...although my blood sugar gets low and then I get loopy.

JO/E
Mom...please...take it...

TAYLOR
Really...I won’t eat them.

WILMA-
Why? Are you against Oreos?

TAYLOR
No. I just said that so you won’t feel bad about taking them.

WILMA
Thanks! I love Oreos. So does this one. If you heat them in the oven, they are heavenly.

JO/E-
I really appreciate it. Now, Mom, you should rest.

(TAYLOR puts on headphones again)

WILMA
So where are you heading, Writer-person?

TAYLOR
Me? To San Diego.

WILMA
So are we!

JO/E
Mom, the whole plane is going to San Diego.

WILMA
But that might not be everyone’s final destination. We are going to see my older son.
TAYLOR
That sounds wonderful. A vacation! (Tries to put earphones back on)

WILMA
IT is NOT a vacation. But I am sure you don’t want to hear about it.

JO/E
My big brother is getting married. And I’m missing prom for this.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT-
Seat belts, please-

TAYLOR
Oh, well that sounds nice...

WILMA
I am VERY worried about it. Very.

JO/E
Mom...she doesn’t need to...hear...

WILMA
You are right. No need to tell this stranger-who0writes our story. But you should know: I think it involves witchcraft.

JO/E
Mom, shush.

You think?

TAYLOR
I know.

TAYLOR (removes headphones for good)
So why are you worried about this wedding?

WILMA
It's crazy. Forget it. (beat) First of all, my son’s fiancée...she’s from New Orleans.

-OK?
That’s not the problem.

It certainly is part of the problem.

Would you guys like a snack? It’s $17 for this bag of potato chips.

No thanks.

Lizzie, that’s her name, just like Lizzie Borden. Lizzie asked that we bring DIRT to the wedding.

“Dirt” as in Gossip?

No! Soil!

For a tree-planting ceremony.

Or to bury people. That’s why my suitcase is so heavy.

She has a bag of dirt in it. From our backyard.

Is that even allowed? On a plane?

It’s not a liquid.

It’s jammed in the overhead compartment.

It’s all weird, if you ask me.

The bride’s family and the groom’s family are all bringing dirt from their home....
WILMA
To add to the “tree.” Wicked, huh?

TAYLOR
I’ve heard of tree plantings before. That’s so beautiful --- all of you are providing nourishment for the roots of this new family.

WILMA
You are definitely a writer, aren’t you? Making weird things sound normal... even nice...

TAYLOR
Planting a tree is nice.

JOE
That’s what I said!

WILMA
Who gardens at a wedding? In a white dress and a tux? It’s so strange.

TAYLOR
A lot of couples like to start new traditions.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Would you like a soft drink? It’s 9 dollars.

WILMA
I think Lizzie is going to do voodoo.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Who? Voodoo?

TAYLOR
Voodoo?

JOE
Voodoo.

WILMA
She’s from New Orleans and she’s against me. She hates me.
FLIGHT ATTENDANT-
Who hates you? Peanuts for later? They are thirty dollars and you can’t eat them now because of nut allergies.

WILMA
My future daughter in law hates me. She’s marrying my son this weekend. I think she’s a witch that wants to do voodoo.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
That doesn’t make any sense. What kind of Voodoo?

WILMA
The kind of Voodoo you would do with dirt from our home.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Who wants dirt at their wedding?

WILMA
See?!

TAYLOR
Why do you think she hates you?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Yes, why?

WILMA
A mother just knows.

(TO/E sighs loudly).

TAYLOR
May I write this down?

WILMA
You must.

PASSENGER
Excuse me, I would like a drink.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Shush! I’m attending this customer.
Well, Rob...he’s my eldest...

He’s 26.

He used to call me every Sunday. Every Sunday.

And now he doesn’t?

I am really thirsty!

Shhhh

And now he calls me every....Monday.

Mom-

Well...he’s still calling...

Why Mondays? Because she is at work...and she has shamed him for calling his mother.

Or maybe they do fun things on the weekend together and there’s more time on Monday to talk.

You writers-always taking the “other” side.

Sounds reasonable..

Or maybe she hates me!
TAYLOR
Why do you think Lizzie hates you?

ALL
Why?

WILMA
Because of the tattoo.

JO/E
Mom...don’t...

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Please do.

WILMA
Eight years ago, my first-born Rob gave me the most unusual and special Mother’s Day gift in the world. He got a tattoo on the left side of his chest.... of my face.

TAYLOR
A tattoo of your face?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
On his chest?

JO/E-
It’s big. And like very detailed. Like you can see individual eyebrow hairs.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT and TAYLOR and PASSENGER-
Oh Wow.

WILMA
I was very surprised...and a little overwhelmed. But that’s what he did. To honor me. And he’s had it for eight years. Except now....

ALL
Yes?

WILMA
Rob called me to tell me that Lizzie wants him to remove it. Remove the tattoo of my face from his chest!!!!

ALL
Ooooh.
WILMA
See? My future daughter-in-law hates me.

(BEAT)

TAYLOR
Well…I don’t know if you should take it personally…I mean…

WILMA
Tattoo removal is expensive and it hurts. She’s asking my son to do something very uncomfortable to him and very hurtful to me.

Yes…but...

TAYLOR
Why does she hate me?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
I mean, it might be awkward for Lizzie to….hug…your son and have to stare at a picture of her Mother-in-law.

WILMA
I am very nice to her. I send her gifts.

TAYLOR
I think most people, no matter how much they love their in-laws, might not want to look at them when they are um…kissing…on the beach.

WILMA
My soon-to-be-daughter-in-law hates me…and you know how I know?

ALL
How?

WILMA
My son has a tattoo of HIS grandmother ‘s face on the right side of his chest. And has she asked him to remove that? NOOOOO, she has not!

(Silence)
TAYLOR
Your son has two tattoos on his chest?

WILMA
Yes...one of me...and one of his grandmother.

(SILENCE)

JO/E
I think Lizzie might be a saint...

TAYLOR
My name is Taylor. May I please write a play about this conversation. No one will believe it.

WILMA
Please do. I don’t want my pain to be in vain.

TAYLOR
This is the best airplane conversation I have ever had.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Me too. Free drinks and snacks for everyone!

ALL
Yay!

PASSENGER
Is this really happening? Free snacks?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Of course not. This is real life. And there is a bottom line. Now please buckle up.

WILMA
The ride ahead might to be bumpy.