

“Like a Subaru in Colorado”

by Sara Tusek

Here I am at MCO, waiting for a Southwest flight to Denver.

The flight’s delayed, and I’ve bought a \$2.50 Snickers bar to soothe my irritation. Behind me two youngish guys are yakking about a Subaru one of them bought. He describes the two-hour drive to some tiny town in the Colorado Rockies to buy an old heap. It’s a 2002 model, he says, rusty as all get-out, with bottomed-out bucket seats, a headliner that looks like it was chewed by a raccoon, and actual holes in the floorboards.

He paid \$2300 for this car and thinks he got a steal. It has great 4-wheel drive, he says. Just what you need in tough weather.

We board the plane 45 minutes late, but the pilot tells us he will make up the time. We take off, my favorite moment of flying—head pushed back against the seat by gravity, feeling the whole plane shake and shimmy, knowing we may crash and turn into a lethal fireball. Normally I am risk-averse, but I love taking off-- I do not need to, in fact cannot, control what is happening to me.

A few hours later we land at DEN. When you walk out of the gate, you could be anywhere. Then you look out the west-facing windows at the Rockies. Takes your breath away.

Liz meets me at baggage claim after a couple of missed phone calls. She looks like she did 40-odd years ago, when I met her at a birthday party on Grass Lake. We were all naked at the time, this being 1973. She has that same grin, like she knows a good joke.

I pull my suitcase to the parking garage, with Liz in the lead. She stops at (you guessed it) a rough-looking old Subaru.

Liz has money—she inherited a ton of cash (and Indian artifacts, which she donated to a museum) from her tough old aunt whom she nursed through her last days. The aunt had a son, Bobby, who did diddly-squat for his mom. When Liz got all the loot, he was bewildered: “She was my mother!” Liz reminded him that he was AWOL as a son for 40 years. Liz is pretty tough herself.

We get in and drive to Boulder, laughing and joking about our lives. I tour the mountainside place they bought a few years ago outside town. This place is her reward after living in flat, hot Oklahoma for 30 years and taking care of her own aging mother (who also left Liz all her money, cutting out Liz’s brother Michael, who did absolutely nothing).

I think about two things: how American Indians really are matrilineal, and how cheap Liz is. She was cheap when we were hippies together, and she still has stuff from those days: a quilt, a dresser, and a husband. Liz can afford a new Subaru, but she bargained hard for an old one. She knows value.

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