

Seven Forever

by Steven John Horay

When he was just seven years old, my little boy experienced thirty-five minutes of severe turbulence above The Atlantic Ocean. It was my fault. I wasn't there. My wife and kids were travelling home from Disneyland, without me. They were travelling without me for the very first time. It was a night flight and lightning struck across the blackest skies. For over thirty minutes the plane rocked and dived. Wind and rain howled against the cries of the terrified passengers. The air hostesses were mostly young, and frightened. One of them had to be given oxygen. Even the captain seemed panicked, faltering as he spoke to reassure the passengers. I wasn't there. Linda told me all this as soon as they landed. Crying hysterically, she fell apart over the phone. I wasn't even at the airport to take them home. I wasn't there to protect them. It was their first holiday without me. My work commitments were too much, just damn too much that year. Nobody held my boys hand. Robyn, my daughter, still says she didn't mind the turbulence. She glared out the windows and bayed the lightening on. She was apathetic even then, aged twelve. Linda, my wife, she was petrified. She momentarily passed out. Now she won't fly without tranquilizers. I don't blame her for not being able to protect our boy. Many of the passengers thought they were going to crash. A light blew out and things fell from the bag compartments. My boy was left alone. Apparently he talked to himself, my boy did. Apparently he tried to keep his eyes closed tight. But he got too scared of not being able to see anything, and just stared at the seat in front of him.

To make things worse I was traveling a lot at the time myself, boarding lots of short haul flights across Europe. And in the aftermath of that horrible flight my boy couldn't bare the idea of *me* flying. Every morning, after putting on my suit and eating my breakfast, I'd stoop down and kiss my boy goodbye. And every morning for two years afterwards he would throw his arms around my neck and cry. Yes, my boy truly believed I was going off to risk

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my life. And on the way to school he would say his prayers three times, avoiding peoples' stares, and the slightest cracks in the pavement. Linda told me about the prayers, because I wasn't there.

By the age of twelve he was scared of practically everything. You could see it in his walk. You could see it in the way he would cross the road, the way he would open a can of Coke, the way he would taste his food. The way he could never turn out his bedroom light.

He always presumes the worst, my boy does. It's a sort of defence mechanism, he told me; a way of protecting himself from the world. He knows he can never be hit as hard by something terrible, if he's already expecting something terrible to happen. But nothing truly terrible has happened to us yet, I told him. Compared to some people, we're lucky. His grandparents are still alive. We have a nice house. We still have our health. But this only fed my boys superstitious nature. Something bad is bound to happen soon enough though, isn't it, Dad? How are you supposed to argue against that? I wish somebody could tell me.

I couldn't help my boy all those years ago. And I blame myself for his anxieties now. Because I know, deep down, that those anxieties started with that horrible flight across the Atlantic. When there was nobody to help him. When my son, aged just seven, truly believed he was going to die.

