Moments in the Community of Women

by Susan Schultz

It's the small stuff. Always. A conversation with a stranger, brief yet so connected it overwhelms you. These encounters can move me beyond my reality, little reminders that, if you just crack the window a little, something very special can blow in.

I had been apartment hunting in Harlem and was disappointed not to have found anything even close to what I needed within my price range. Dispirited, I got on the subway at 150th street to take the train back downtown where I was staying with my Aunt. One divorce, one daughter, two lovers, three decades of hard work, and a fiftieth Birthday party later, I feel homeless. No, let's face it, *I AM* homeless.

The woman I sit next to is reading a booklet with tidbits of the Bill of Rights and Constitution — questions and answers. I ask her if she's studying for her US citizenship exam. I was familiar with the process since my (now EX) Husband had finally decided to take the exam after ten years in the US and fifteen years of marriage. She smiles and says yes, she is.

In the five stops we travel together I find out she had been in the US for thirty years. She had five children, and she had left her husband after 25 years of marriage. She is very happy without him, more content than she's ever been. I smile and tell her I too have left mine after 22 years, and that I too was very happy without him. We share how hard it was to leave, while agreeing that it was worth every trouble and moment of insecurity. There would be no more rationalization for us. We no longer have to settle for complacency or numbness… We talk and talk, and in so little time, we share a lifetime.

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When my stop comes, I rise and wish her good luck with the exam, but she grabs my arm and pulls me back. She kisses both my cheeks and tells me she knows I will have the most wonderful life.

It was a moment of pure connection, an intimate exchange with a stranger, or was she? A lovely reminder that so many women have done what I did, or dream about doing it. That sunsets always beget sunrises. That a moment can make you smile for the rest of your life.