

The World According to Me  
by Mary LoVerde

Do you sometimes live in “The World According to Me?” This is a world in which you gather some of the data, then fill in the blanks (often erroneously) with your interpretation- and declare that your conclusion must be true. Do you ever get so fixated on controlling your world that you take events and put them through the filter of “how does this affect me”?

I learned the danger of living in the “World According to Me” the hard way. I flew to a small town on the East Coast last year, which meant I had to change from a nice big 747 to one of those Tonka Toy planes where everyone has both a window and an aisle seat. Our small group of travelers trudged onto the tarmac, anxious to get on board. An airline official decided that a woman in a wheelchair should board first. She took one step onto the stairs when it suddenly began to rain. Within minutes, the wind whipped up, impaling icy drops into our faces. We stood there in the downpour, watching her slowly ascend the stairs.

Two steps from the top, she collapsed to her knees, and try as she might, she could not pull herself up. The handful of us at the bottom of the stairs had two reactions: One group could not take their eyes off her as she knelt stranded in midair. Eyes bored into this woman, willing her to stand up. The other group diverted their eyes, tried to cover their sopping wet heads with their briefcases, and looked down at the puddles.

The flight attendant stood at the door of the plane, trying unsuccessfully to lift the woman. He motioned for help. A baggage handler ran up the steps and tried to lift from behind. I sympathized with the woman’s plight and silently prayed for her, but after a while, I stood there thinking of the absurdity of this situation. I looked like I’d gone for a swim fully dressed! I could only envision the first impression I would make when my client picked me up at the next airport-assuming I would ever arrive at my destination. I could feel my canvas carry-on bag getting heavier and knew the papers inside were getting wetter by the minute. I also knew the clothes in my luggage (which was sitting on the tarmac waiting for the baggage handler to get the woman on board) were probably soaked, too. I pictured in my mind a ruined pale pink suit.

Out of the cold mist, a man behind me who was looking up at the woman still struggling to move said, “Now there’s a lady who must really want to go somewhere!”

Oh, my. I immediately realized that I was in the World According to Me. *I* was wet. *I* was tired. *I* was impatient. But *I* wasn't stuck the top of a stairway in the middle of a rainy airfield with a dozen travelers staring at me. I could walk up a flight of stairs. I would dry out. I could buy a new suit. I had filled in the vacuum with how this event affected me. In my mind I was chattering, "Can't someone else load this luggage? Have they ever heard of umbrellas? If they had used a jetway, this wouldn't be happening. Why did my travel agent put me on a such a dinky plane?" My controlling mind-set was making me miserable. Me, me, me! I felt so ashamed of myself! As a result of just one little remark, the attitude of the whole crowd changed, and we endured the downpour with a little more grace and gratitude after this kind and insightful man put us in our place.

A few of my colleagues discouraged me from telling this story: "Gee, Mary, you sound so self-centered and unkind, and you're not." I appreciate their vote of confidence, and I'd love to tell you that I never have a less than charitable thought, that I fill in the blanks only with other people's best interests in mind. Wouldn't we all like to think of ourselves as people who spend most of our time taking homemade casseroles to shut-ins? The brutal truth is that sometimes I reside in the World According to Me, and I can tell you it's a dreary, lonely place. What about you? Perhaps living in the WATM is a roadblock for you, too. Get out of that world and you will find your life is much more in balance.

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