

2-19-09

"Sadiq Lukman! Sadiq Lukman! Please report to Gate A8! Your flight is ready to depart!"

I was at the SeaTac Airport tonight, awaiting my flight to Detroit, when a traveler, Sadiq Lukman, was paged over the loudspeaker. It vaguely crossed my mind that Sadiq Lukman is a very common Muslim name – we have many Sadiqs and many Lukmans at Hope Academy, but I didn't think about it again, and when my flight was called, boarded the plane to Detroit.

My seat, 28B, was in the middle of the row; I squeezed in between an average sized woman and a very huge African man who was sitting in his place and half of mine! I was pretty sure the man was African; there was a distinctive smell of spicy food about him – African cooking spices – and he didn't speak English, only motioning and pointing with his lips when he wanted something from the flight attendant.

The man also was very kind to me – jumping up when I arrived, helping to put my bag in the overhead bin, and volunteering a pillow and blanket from the opposite bin! This caring for elders is very common for African young people.

So of course, I asked which country he was from, in Africa. As soon as he said, Mauritania, I greeted him in French, and away we went into long conversations covering the evils of the wars in Rwanda and Congo, (the Koran advocates peace, he said – not fighting over land and gold,) fishing in Alaska, the port town of Nouakchott where his family lives, and the work I do with the Fulani in Nigeria.

When I mentioned the Fulani and asked if there were any of this tribe in Mauritania, Sadiq told me HE was Fulani! I was so surprised! We exchanged the usual Ffulde greeting, "Sanu!" with smiles and handshakes, then continued the conversation in French.

He said the Fulani in Mauritania are fishermen! Isn't that interesting! So that's the background of his being a fisherman in Alaska! I asked him where he lived, and he seemed nervous, looked around then whispered to me, Philadelphia. I wonder if he's in the country illegally.

Sadiq was poorly dressed – ill-fitting jeans and old fashioned, padded ski jacket - old, worn tennis shoes. He was hungry and reached out for food from the flight attendant, but he had no funds with which to buy the packaged sandwiches. The flight attendant was so kind, bringing back a free snack from the galley. Sadiq seemed down on his luck, though he obviously has some money for this plane ride.

When we parted at the gate, I shook Sadiq's hand and prayed God's blessing upon him. He walked away waving and saying, "Amin, Amin." How I wish I could have done more

for him. Could we just pray that God will remember Sadiq and connect him up with the physical and spiritual help he needs?

His name is Sadiq Lukman.

- Phyllis Sortor