

Birds of a Feather. . . .

by Kathryn I. Manning PhD, *known to most of us as Kim Manning**

Birds of a feather . . . can cause utter chaos and pandemonium when introduced at an airport security checkpoint, if you time it just right!

I had been invited by my mentor/dissertation advisor to present some of my research findings on the use of humor to his colleagues at an international “think tank” being held in Vancouver, British Columbia. His colleagues included some of the world’s smartest people. These were the teachers of the teachers who would teach the rest of the world about ecology, saving the planet, and when we will be able to travel back in time. They are, indeed, some of the wisest people I’ve ever met, but many had lost touch with the ability to play. That’s where I fit in.

What many of us who have had the pleasure of working with Beacon Street have come to realize is that what we assume to be “normal and typical” is neither for most of the world. I assumed that most people have juggled, twisted balloon shapes, painted their faces or balanced peacock feathers. I was sadly mistaken. When I asked Bob about taking a few hundred feathers with me, he wisely advised carrying them with me on board and be sure to have a few extra to give away should a sad looking security worker need one. I am grateful that he 1) suggested bringing extras, and 2) that he had a few hundred in his attic.

The first leg of my flight went rather well and we arrived in Seattle ahead of schedule. While waiting for my connecting flight to Vancouver, I made friends with a teacher and her mom who were heading back home. They were fascinated with the feathers and how others reacted to them, especially the adults.

As we waited, the airline began to post time delays for our flight. At first it was ten minutes, then thirty, and then “CANCELLED” all together. Now, I don’t know how most feel about flying, but when they told me the cancellation was due to “mechanical problems,” I was grateful for the opportunity to find another ride to my destination. This was not, however, the opinion shared by the other ninety-nine passengers on that flight. Within t

ten minutes our line of formerly calm and docile fellow fliers had become rude and quite obnoxious toward the flight crew behind the desk. The crew knew no more than we did, truly, but now they were receiving the brunt of everyone’s impatience.

A woman behind me began to cry. She explained, loudly enough for several of us to hear, that she had just adopted a little girl from Russia and needed to get her to Vancouver for an emergency medical procedure. I expected the crowd around us to ooze compassion and sympathy. They did not.

So I offered ten peacock feathers to the person who would give up their seat on the next flight out. An elderly gentleman stepped forward, accepted the plumes, and then asked me what he should do with them. I demonstrated the fine art of “balancing” things in our lives, and keeping our “eyes fixed” on what is important. Fifteen minutes later, I had passed out about one hundred feathers. Most everyone in line, while waiting for the airline to straighten out the mess, had “backed off” and began to balance feathers on hands and noses.

Eventually I made it to Vancouver, and through customs, but not without a bit of explanation. The officials wanted to know the nature of the feathers, their uses, and why I had three hundred red foam noses in my carryon baggage!

The symposium was a hit and I have had many invitations since to speak to other groups about the use of humor in our lives. It seems that all humans crave laughter and joy, in varying amounts. I’m not sure when my “clown chakra” opened and I began to see what was funny in life, but the image of those one hundred plus people sprouting feathers on their noses will be a cherished memory for many years to come.

**Kim finished her doctoral studies just a couple years back. She has been a teacher for more than twenty-five years and is currently teaching in the Shaker Heights system. Her area of expertise is the sciences and her junior high students prize her wit, wisdom, and unconventional manner.*