My Story...by Judy Vinegar

Airline Travel: A Problem for People with Hearing Loss

Last week, I summarized one of my favorite "Twilight Zone" episodes. This week, I'm creating my **own** episode inspired by a personal experience...

<u>FADE IN</u> (Rod Sterling narrating...)

There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to man. It is a dimension as vast as space and timeless as infinity. It is the middle ground between light and shadow.... It is an area we call the Twilight Zone. (Eerie music playing).

Imagine if you will, a woman boarding an airplane and settling down into the comfortable cubby space of her seat knowing that she will soon be home. The trip was brief and by all counts a success. Her mind drifts with pleasant thoughts as the plane streaks across the night sky.

ACT I

The weather turns aggressive and rain begins pelting against the small window. Lightning sparks and thunder crashes disturbing the peace of the tiny interior. The "fasten seatbelt" light dings and flashes.

Pilot (on intercom)

Periodically, the pilot speaks again on the intercom. All of what he says is incomprehensible. But this is nothing unusual. The woman has a hearing loss and can never understand what is being said on an airplane intercom.

ACT II

The plane finally lands. Passengers leave their seats and head out. The woman begins to walk confidently towards the baggage claim. Suddenly, she is filled with alarm. This is not her hometown airport! Where is she? She has no idea. Strange airport shops and strange people are everywhere.

ACT III

After many attempts to find out what happened from airport personnel, she discovers that she is in Detroit. The pilot re-routed the plane because of bad weather. The woman spends the night in the airport.

FADE OUT

The woman looks out on the rain swept airport runways in Detroit. A distant clap of thunder crashes and lightning shatters the darkness. In the sudden hush following the thunder, she hears the enemy breathing down her neck. This enemy is familiar to her. Its name is **ISOLATION** due to hearing loss. It sits there waiting to trip her up yet again...in the Twilight Zone.

Here's Your Chance!

Air travel is still not accessible to people with hearing loss. The Department of Transportation (DOT) is currently seeking comments to help make air travel more accessible. Your comments can be sent electronically through the Dockets Management System pages of the DOT website:

http://dms.dot.gov/submit/

The title is "Accommodations for individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or deaf-blind."

Accommodations Aboard the Aircraft

I want the DOT to know that I need to hear what is being said over the public address system. This means providing information in a clear, understandable visual format. Getting information into a visual format can be accomplished in any number of ways (crawls, video monitor, or notes on a whiteboard).

Already I can feel the isolation retreating as I get a chance to say what's on my mind. Please join me by sending your comments to the DOT.

We need to speak up if we have trouble traveling.