

Working Title: Megan's Antiques

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Megan's Antiques
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She was already on the plane when I boarded. Her mother stood in the aisle trying to console her, who looked to be about 10 years old. I would learn later in the flight that the girl was en route from Dallas to Georgia where her father lived. A father myself, I know about teaching children not to talk to strangers, so I introduced myself to the girl's mother. I explained I wanted her daughter to know if she had her mother's permission to chat with me during the flight. Her mother smiled approvingly, and introduced me to Megan.

I used the introduction to show Megan what I had brought with me to work on during the flight. I'm an HO model railroading enthusiast. Finding time for my hobby can be a challenge, so on this trip I'd brought along a building – a small retail shop – to paint. I leaned slightly towards Megan and invited her to help me with it later if she wanted. Just then, the cabin crew signaled the plane was ready to leave the gate, and Megan and her mother said their goodbyes while I stowed my supplies under the seat.

For awhile after we took off, Megan occupied herself with a book she'd brought. When the plane reached cruising altitude, I got out my supplies and silently went to work painting some window trim. Awhile later, Megan leaned slightly towards me and said simply, "I'm ready." I got out a second brush and helped her get started. We spent the rest of the flight painting in tandem. Our hands occupied, we enjoyed that pleasant kind of small talk that years later still brings a warm smile, if few details.

As we neared our destination, I told Megan that each store on my layout gets a name. "If you could have your own shop, what kind of store would you like to have?" I asked. Despite her young age, she had a real interest in antiques. She nodded with a grin when I proposed that I name this store, "Megan's Antiques."

The process of building a model railroad is like decorating a house. It's never really meant to be finished. For me, modeling is a metaphor that affirms that the journey is what is most important. So I strive to remain alert; for along the way, often when I least expect it, a wonderful gift lands in my lap – or in the seat next to me.