

A Space Flight Gone Wrong

Imagine that you are on a spaceship and it crash-lands on a planet called Aurora. When you exit the ship, you meet the local Aurorans, who all look pretty much the same as Earthlings with one exception: all the Aurorans have wings. Amazingly, you learn that they can fly at speeds of up to 100 miles an hour without any special equipment. This incredible ability has fundamentally affected their society. They only have walkways and landing pads, since there is no need for roads. This also means there are no cars or any other vehicles except for flying freight trucks and long-distance airplanes. In addition, there is no need for stairs or elevators between floors of buildings, except freight elevators.

Your translator computer works perfectly, and the Aurorans welcome you to their planet. With some non-essential items from the spaceship, you barter with the Aurorans to get an apartment and a small sum of money to get started on.

You try to settle into Aurora until the ship can be repaired, which could take a long while. Without stairs, you find you can't even get above the ground floor of most buildings. Sometimes they offer for you to take the freight elevator, which is often reached through a truck dock or a back alley, when one is available at all. However, some buildings have their main entrance above the ground floor, so you cannot even get to the ground-floor rooms.

You think about buying a bicycle to get around on the walkways faster and farther. However, since Aurorans do not use bicycles, you would have to special-order the bicycle from a niche business, making it way more expensive than a bicycle would be on Earth. A motorcycle or car would be out of the question. Also, you suspect that a bicycle would get you a lot of stares. It is not illegal to ride on the walkways, but the bicycle would really stand out on the walkways, where there are only pedestrians.

You take little time before applying for jobs, but some of the places where you want to apply are too far away to get to without flying. After submitting dozens of job applications online, you get called back for interviews by five of your top-choice employers. But every time, when you arrive at the interview, you are told the job is no longer open. You start to wonder if it is because you cannot fly. One agency director is blunt --- when he interviews you for a job, he says he's uncomfortable hiring you, because if there were some kind of emergency, you could get trapped on the upper floors and couldn't fly to safety.

You also notice that in public, some people behave strangely around you. One day as you are walking to the grocery store, a stranger suddenly grabs you, picks you up in her arms, and takes off, saying "Here, I'll get you there faster." She flies the wrong direction! Where does she think you were trying to go? You protest, both being grabbed by a stranger and going the wrong way, but she either misunderstands or won't listen. A mile further from the grocery store, she looks offended, swoops down low, and drops you on a grassy field. She grumbles "I was just trying to help" before vanishing back into the sky. Finally arriving at the grocery store, you find

that cashiers speak to you as if you are a child, and some Auroran children stare at you. One time in a restaurant, another stranger approaches you and gives you \$100 out of the blue. You aren't sure whether to question why he assumed you were poor or to just take the money, as your finances are indeed starting to dwindle.

Unfortunately, it turns out that your spaceship has been damaged beyond repair, and the Aurorans do not have the technology to build a new one, even if you had the money to buy it. All of the important parts of the spaceship are trashed, and so they are only worth a little bit of money to sell. You must figure out how to live the rest of your life on Aurora.

Discussion questions:

1. How would you adapt to living on Aurora? How would you meet your transportation and access needs without the ability to fly? Provide at least one specific solution you would devise.
2. How would you want the Aurorans to treat you? What could they do to improve your financial prospects and support your happiness on Aurora?
3. Are there people here in this country who experience treatment similar to what's described here? In what ways does their situation parallel the situation on Aurora? In what ways does it differ from the situation on Aurora?

** Adapted from Hillman, J. & Martin, R. A. (2002). Lessons about gay and lesbian lives: A spaceship exercise. *Teaching of Psychology*, 29, 308-311.