

News

Kind Stranger, Autistic Girl Reunite In N.J. After Thank You Note Goes Viral

April 11, 2014 8:13 PM



337



16



12

Related Tags: [autism](#), [autism awareness](#), [Easter Seals New Jersey](#), [Easter Seals Walk With Me 5K](#), [Eric Kunkel](#), [Kate Mouland](#), [MetLife Stadium](#), [Shanell Mouland](#), [Sonia Rincon](#)

EAST BRUNSWICK, N.J. (CBSNewYork) – There was an emotional reunion in New Jersey this week for the mother of an autistic girl and a stranger she met on a plane.

As CBS 2's Sonia Rincon reported, [the letter from a grateful mother of a little girl with autism went viral almost overnight](#).

The message to the patient and kind businessman who sat next to 3-year-old Kate on a plane was shared again and again and found its way to him.

"I only wrote it thinking the few people that followed my blog would read it and know we had a great [experience](#) and I never in a million years thought it would reach Eric," Kate's mother Shanell Mouland told Rincon.

The Moulands are from Canada and Eric Kunkel lives in New Jersey.

Kunkel was the man who never corrected little Kate when she called him "Daddy" and engaged her in conversation.

"I just said yeah, OK. I mean, it's just a little girl trying to deal with a situation that I think being on a plane for any 3-year-old is a stressful time," Kunkel said.

His family was in another row, and Kate's real Daddy

Sponsored Links

[Advertise Here](#)


LifeLock® Services

24/7 Credit Fraud Monitoring Plan. Proactive Credit Fraud Protection. LifeLock.com



Save with Cheap Caribbean

3 Days Only! Up to 65% off All Inclusive Beach Vacations [cheapcaribbean.com](#)

CBS New York (con't)

Affordable Care Act Updates:

[CBSNewYork.com/ACA](#)

Health News & Information:

[CBSNewYork.com/Health](#)

Sponsored by



New Jersey's only
Living Donor Institute

**Barnabas Health
Renal Transplant Center**

Saint Barnabas Medical Center

Life is better healthy.

CBS LOCAL Circulars



American Signature
EXPIRES TODAY



Target
THIS WEEK ONLY

[See all your local circulars](#)

MORE FROM CBS NEW YORK

was also on the plane with her sister. Moulard said she never thought Kunkel would be so understanding when he sat down.

"I looked at him and I thought he's got [business](#) to take care of, he's not going to want to deal with Kate," Moulard told Rincon.

She said she judged him and was wrong.

In her letter, Moulard wrote that she had been nervous when she and her daughter first sat down.

"For a fleeting moment I thought we might have a free seat beside us and then you walked up and sat down with your briefcase and your important documents and I had a vision of Kate pouring her water all over your multi-million [dollar](#) contracts, or house deeds, or whatever it was you held," she wrote. "The moment you sat down, Kate started to rub your arm. Your jacket was soft and she liked the feel of it. You smiled at her and she said: 'Hi, Daddy, that's my mom.' Then she had you."

But Kate tried to engage Kunkel, Moulard wrote.

Kate: (Upon noticing you had an iPad) "Is dis Daddy's puduter?"

You: "This is my iPad. Would you like to see it?"

Kate: "To me?????" (I know she thought you were offering it to her to keep)

Me: "Look with your eyes, Kate. That is not yours."

Kate: "Dat's nice!"

You: (Upon noticing that Kate had an iPad) "I like your computer, too. It has a nice purple case."

Kate: "Daddy wanna be a bad guy?" (She offered Shredder [a figure of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles villain] to you and that, my friend, is high praise)

You: Cool.

It was not until later that Kunkel learned Kate had autism.

"When Shanell said 'Kate has autism,' I was just, 'OK,'" Kunkel said.

He didn't know much about it then, but it inspired him to get involved with the Easter Seals, a non-profit that [helps](#) raise awareness of autism.

"It's been such an honor to have someone with the spirit and compassion that Eric has join our board," Anysa Holder with Easter Seals New Jersey said.

Their reunion happened in New Jersey in time for the [Easter Seals Walk With Me 5K](#) at MetLife Stadium this weekend. Both families will be walking together.

Moulard and Kunkel also took some time to [share](#) their story with high school students in East Brunswick.

"To teach our kids and our students that it takes just as much energy to be nice to somebody as it does to be mean," Principal Robert Feldman of Career Development High School told Rincon.

Both are getting lots of kind messages and thanks from strangers now: Eric Kunkel for his understanding, Shanell Moulard, for helping others understand with that heartfelt letter.

"The things I like to hear the most are the people that say they think differently when they travel now," Moulard said.

You May Also Be Interested In These Stories

- [FEMA Rental Assistance Set To Run Out For 1,300 NY, NJ Families Displaced By Sandy](#)
- [Staten Island Rep. Michael Grimm Pleads Not Guilty To 20-Count Indictment](#)
- [Singer Paul Simon, Wife Edie Brickell Appear In Court After Alleged Domestic Dispute](#)
- [American Dream Megamall To Be Redesigned, Open In 2016](#)



Dermatologists Say It's Better Than a Facelift



#1 WORST food for weight gain (avoid)



FBI Uses The Pimsleur Language Method?



[Philadelphia] New Auto Rule Has Drivers Furious!

ADVERTISEMENT



337



16



12

FROM AROUND THE WEB

WE RECOMMEND



LATEST NEWS VIDEO



Rep. Michael Grimm Charged In 20-Count...

More Videos

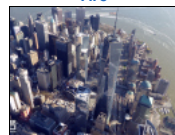
LATEST GALLERIES



Ocean County Forest Fire



Citi Field/Flushing Meadows



Aerials Of 1 WTC, 9/11...



World's Fair 50th



Follow CBS New York



CBS New York
Like 230,209

Follow @CBSnewyork

52.4K followers



Follow



Follow More Stations and Personalities