

Fly the Overcrowded Skies and get a Friendly Surprise

by *Lori_Borgman*

The airlines warned us in May that travel this summer would be more crowded, more expensive and more hostile.

They were right about the expensive part. A flight I often take not only went up nearly 50 percent in price, they cut out the bag of four miniature pretzels as well. No doubt the next step will be to eliminate the drinks. The stewardess will come on the intercom and tell those who are thirsty to go to the restroom, cup their hands and drink from the faucet.

They were right about the crowds. It used to be that you boarded an aircraft by seat row. Now the crowds are so large you board by group number. Picture a rancher moving cattle. An attendant calls a group number, then a small herd rumbles forward, jostling into a single file line as they squeeze through the stockyards, er, I mean jet way.

Airlines can move a greater number of passengers at a greater speed this way, but still retain enough control to avert an all-out stampede.

I was hoofing it through the jet way with my fellow bovines, I mean travelers, and had boarded the plane when the line came to an abrupt halt. A man with a buzz cut was asking a man with a mustache if he would switch seats so he could sit with his pregnant wife.

The mustache smiled and said, "Sure, no problem." The crew-cut eased into the aisle and the moustache wedged in front of him. They did a quick two-step, switched seats, and the line shuffled forward.

I reached my seat and heard the woman across the aisle ask the man beside her if he would mind switching seats so she could sit next to her daughter. He said he would be happy to.

It was as though the captain had released Friendly Sky pellets into the ventilation system.

The man slid across to the aisle seat as the mother climbed over his legs, lugging a carry-on bag, her daughter's neon pink backpack and snacks, smacking him in the chest and clipping him on the chin. All he did was smile.

I doubled-checked my ticket to make sure I wasn't on a flight headed to Mayberry.

Just when I thought I'd seen it all, a harried middle-aged woman boarded late and was struggling to cram her luggage into the overhead bin when a young man jumped up and gave her a hand.

My mouth was still hanging open when the woman next to me said, "Did you hear about the little girl in row 15? It's her first day in the States. Her adoptive parents are bringing her back from China."

Several rows ahead, a small tot with jet black hair and almond-shaped eyes was jumping on her new daddy's lap for a better view of the action. A collective "oohhhh" went up from the passengers behind her.

I have been on flights where hostility stretched like a bungee cord from the cockpit to the rear exit, where passengers crabbed at one another for looking out the window and a cad reading the New York Times threw each section into the aisle as he finished it.

This flight may not have been a typical picture of who we often are, but it was a nice reminder of who we can sometimes be.

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