

It's a Crazy, Crazy Airplane Ride

By: Noelle Hancock

A wise man once said, "Nothing brings you down to earth like a letdown." Apparently, the same is true for rapid massive fuel loss on an airplane. I learned this over Spring Break when my Hawaiian Airlines flight nearly turned into a cruise.

I've always had my doubts about air travel, an industry based upon the insane urge to go blasting through the skies in a pressurized metal tube. How much confidence can I have in a form of transportation that departs from something called "terminals"? No, that's not ominous at all. And let's not even discuss the term "final destination."

So, thus far, I'd taken proper precautions, avoiding lesser-known airlines with questionable names like the somebody-failed-their-marketing-class marvel "Casino Airlines." I can't speak for anyone else, but when I'm at 30,000 feet, I don't want to be on a plane that in any way implies taking a gamble. Likewise, I've never flown Virgin Airlines although there's a first time for everything. (Ba-dum-bum. Noelle Hancock, ladies and gentlemen -- I'll be here all week!)

Sorry. Moving on.

The new safety measures have done little to assuage my fears. Personally, I think we're going about this whole airplane security thing the wrong way. I say instead of prohibiting people from carrying weapons, make it a requirement. Hell, if every passenger is packing heat, who's gonna try something? However, like my university, the airports refuse to recognize my self-appointed position as Boss of Everything and do not heed my suggestions (I still say requiring every class at Yale be taught by a black Baptist minister would be dope). So it seemed, Don't Mess with Texas Airways would have to wait until after I graduate and achieve my goal of world domination.

Until then, my air travel would be mostly limited to Southwest Airlines. Southwest Airlines is to American cities as Connecticut Limo is to Holiday Inns. By this, I mean that you reach cruising altitude only to immediately descend and land in a city the next state over. This phenomenon continues until you finally arrive in your designated state in time to attend your own funeral. Due to this high rate of passenger turnover, Southwest forgoes serving actual meals. Instead it offers a truly bizarre package containing a breakfast bar, a packet of cheese, and a stick of meat. Personally, I believe this is so stewardesses (stewardii?) can listen to passengers ask each other, "Can I eat your meat stick?" They then lock themselves in the lavatory and laugh for the duration of the flight. Other than this, and minor irritations like the flight attendants still asking me if I'm old enough to fly alone, my trips home on Southwest have been uneventful.

My Hawaiian Airlines flight was slightly more gripping, particularly when a stewardess chirped over the loudspeaker, "We're experiencing low fuel pressure and are losing fuel. We're going to have to make an emergency landing. Aloha." This announcement was

punctuated by a bout of turbulence and my wails. While I naturally always assumed I'd go out in style in a totally pimped-out coffin, I hadn't envisioned it having wings and its own engine. No. It couldn't end this way. Not after having just watched "Shallow Hal" (not that the movie itself hadn't unearthed latent suicidal tendencies). I -- and the people on either side of me -- immediately regretted my decision not to use the restroom at the airport (Houston's Hobby Airport bathrooms consist of a row of latrines on a dirt floor. I couldn't go there. Literally.)

Apprehensively, I looked out my window at the ocean. To think, the last thing I'd eaten was sushi: Irony at its finest. I then began to contemplate the wording of the in-flight safety instructions. "In the event of a water landing--" Water LANDING? Are there runways down in the Pacific unbeknownst to me? They should tell it like it is. Stewardesses should be forced to say, "In the event of a water crashing: Swim. If you can't, your bottom seat cushion can be used as a harmful device. Take this moment and use it to pummel your parents for skimping on lessons. And then pummel me."

As I pondered this, the ocean suddenly gave way to land. We swooped unsteadily into the airport. The runway was lined with fire trucks, ambulances, and guys in fireproof suits ready to excavate our charred remains. I thought about the things in life I would miss out on. I'd never get to do grownup things like wear Prada or build a diversified portfolio of mutual funds. Never again would I see that "World's Largest Casino" Internet pop-up window or the one advertising the creepy camera that lets you spy on your hot neighbors. Or what if I did survive only to be seriously maimed? What if I ended up a total amputee, forced to go as a tube sock for Halloween every year? Or a Southwest Airlines meat stick?

To make a long story slightly less long, we survived. The plane landed successfully. Spring Break in Hawaii was outstanding. And on the return flight home, I reflected on how fortunate I was. I had escaped unharmed with full use of all my limbs. I had been given a second chance. I knew what I had to do. I picked up my bottom seat cushion and pummeled the entire flight crew. And boy are my arms tired.