

Fear of Flying

I'm afraid of many of things, but I've never been afraid of flying. Here's why: A lot of people go on trips and most of them come back.

Besides, most of the time when you get on an airplane, you're going somewhere you want to go. I, for example, got on a plane on a recent subzero day and got off in sunny Tampa. Of course, it wasn't sunny right away; it was dark. That's because our flight had been delayed due to bad weather back home. But a dark evening in Tampa beats a blizzard in broad daylight.

That is not to say air travel doesn't come with some stressors. If you're like me, when you get to the airport, you're still in the "Shoot! Did I remember to lock the front door" phase of your trip. Then you go through security and suddenly, someone walking out your front door with your big screen television is the least of your worries.

It's embarrassing standing there in stocking feet, digging through your carry-on for your quart-sized bag of 3-ounce bottles, while other travelers get a good look at everything you thought was important enough to carry on the plane.

Not only that, the whole process makes you feel strangely guilty. You wonder if you absentmindedly put the butter knife in your carry-on after breakfast. And what if, without thinking, you utter the word "bomb" and wind up being interrogated. Calm down. Remember a lot of people go through security, and most of them are allowed on the plane. Or maybe that's not such a comforting thought.

Eventually you get your belongings loaded into tubs and shoved through the scanner. So far, so good. Then you walk through the metal detector and set off the alarm. You take off your belt and hope your pants don't fall down. Meanwhile you're trying to keep an eye on your laptop which is way ahead of you now and looking very vulnerable. You're so flustered when you finish that you forget to zip your carry-on, and when you pick it up, everything falls out. If you'd looked this crazed when you started the process, they'd have pulled you out for questioning right away.

The wait in the boarding area gives you time to relax--in some cases a lot of time. But waiting is preferable to sprinting down long corridors as your flight is being called. Eventually you board, if the weather and your luck hold out.

If you're like me, you think you should listen to the safety instructions, both out of respect for the flight attendant and because, well, what if something happens? You're tempted to stand up and scold everyone who isn't listening. "In the unlikely event that we land in Lake Michigan, are YOU going to know how to use your seat as a floatation device? I think NOT!" But you're too polite for that, plus there might be an air marshal on board.

You peek furtively at the person next to you. It seems odd to sit that close to someone for so long and not introduce yourself, ask where he's from, and if he knows your Aunt

Harriet who used to live there too. Of course, she doesn't live there now. She moved four years ago after she left your Uncle John for, would you believe it, an airline pilot. Of course, it's even odder to sit that close to someone you've never met and talk too much. You hope he thinks so too.

The captain comes on to say that the airplane has reached its cruising altitude. You have no idea what he's saying, but his voice is reassuring nonetheless. The attendant brings you peanuts, babies cry, and the passenger in front of you puts his seat back all the way. Otherwise the flight is uneventful--one hopes.

After the plane lands everyone gets up and stands in the aisle as though doing so will make the door open faster. It doesn't. When it does open, you follow the herd to the baggage claim area. This is a good time to remind yourself that a lot of people go on trips, and most of them come back with their luggage.

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