

EDITOR'S ETC.

BY DEAN MERRILL



Do you sometimes grow tired of speakers and writers telling about their many encounters on airplanes? "The other day I was flying to Washington" (or Miami, or London . . . never Duluth, you understand) "and sitting next to me was this delightful woman who said . . ."

If so, I apologize . . . but I really was on a flight last year where I learned something. It was an AirCal hop from the Bay Area down to Los Angeles, and sitting next to me were two San Jose State coeds heading home for Easter break.

"Don't you just hate these small planes?" the one with the peach-colored hair said to the other as she tried to stuff her plastic bag filled with a boom box, cosmetic case and a sunhat under the seat. Actually, it was a Boeing 737 featuring "Executive Class Service," which meant more than the usual legroom. She finally made the items fit and began her search for a seat belt.

"Get some air in here—it's so stuffy," said her friend, fiddling with the vents above. Ten rows ahead, a flight attendant ran through her welcome speech, but the plane was still parked at the gate, and the departure hour had passed. "Oh, G____, if this stupid airline is

late—!" the first girl exploded.

I really should have kept a silent count of the number of complaints aired in a single 70-minute flight. That's the contemporary style, you know: *I've paid my money, bought my ticket, and now I get to sound off about*

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everything that's wrong. It's "consumer's privilege."

Most of us grew up assuming this about sporting events; the admission fee includes the right to yell at the referee. (I'm not sure I agree, but that's another subject.) In the 1980's it seems all of life has become a trip to the ball park. The right to complain extends round the clock.

The day was overcast, and Miss Peach looked toward the window to my left. "Look at those clouds!" she exclaimed. "If we have to land in San Diego, I'll be so mad. . . ." A boyfriend would be waiting in L.A., and she soon fell to worrying about her appearance. "Jeff's going to think I'm fat," she moaned, looking down at her bright-colored jumpsuit. "I feel like a pink cow."

I waited to see if something, *anything*, would be good about this day. Was anything worth appreciating, worth smiling about? No. The entire world was a pain.

My mind went back to a reminder my mother used to voice occasionally when I was a boy: "Some people would gripe if they were in heaven." Ephesians 4:29 is terribly out of vogue these days, but it's still a valid notion: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful . . . that it may benefit those who listen."

Some hassles in life are simply part of the territory. Traffic. The price of hamburger. Congested bathrooms on Sunday mornings. Aunt Mildred. Snowstorms. Heading home in the dark on these short winter days. God's rules on moral restraint. We didn't cause any of them, and neither can we change them. In the meantime, complaining doesn't do much good. Some things in life "just is."

Which leads me to a radical question: Is anyone interested in voluntarily giving up his Constitutional Freedom to Gripe? Ah, well, just thought I'd ask. . . .

Dean Merrill

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