

Dear Coyotepaws:

You and I grew up believing that hard work makes a good man, and that doing tough jobs makes good folks better. We lived according to that credo over the years, and we played hard and worked harder.

Today my body is cashing I.O.U's that I wrote when I was young, strong and believed I would live forever. That means that me and the painkiller pills don't get too far apart. Yet I don't stand in the back of the pen when there is a tough job to do.

But there are some jobs that are just too hard for this Old Prairie Dog. I wouldn't want to be Conrad Black's image consultant, or a gag writer for Darrel Sutter. Those are real tough jobs. Another job that I won't tackle- working as a pilot or as an airline flight attendant.

Remember when the airline business was seen as exciting and romantic? Many a prairie boy dreamed of getting his pilot's wings and flying to romantic destinations like Paris, Vienna or Denver. Prairie girls dreamed of marrying a rancher with a big place in the foothills or working as an airline stewardess.

How the airline business has changed! Brutal fuel costs, increased security expenses and competition tougher than a barroom brawl on a Maple Creek Saturday night have transformed the airline industry. Today's airliner is just a big old bus with wings crammed with people, some already cranky from their pre-flight encounter with airport security.

Still, it's only a few of the passengers that make working for an airline such a tough job. Most flyers are just normal folks going about their business, but there also some who are very, very unique.

Consider the case of good ol' James Whipple of Sand, Utah. James had a couple of "really big beers" at the Boise, Idaho airport before boarding his Sky West plane. He used the cabin restroom to offload some of the brew before the plane took off on its one-hour flight to Salt Lake City. Prior to actual take-off, the captain announced that the restroom would be off-limits once the plane was airborne because a light wasn't working.

Remember, this is only a one-hour flight, but James had downed a couple of REALLY big beers. It wasn't long and he had to go again- REAL bad. Poor old James was caught between a rock and a hard bladder.

What did James Whipple do? Being a resourceful Utah male, he just unleashed ol' Willy and offloaded the processed Schlitz into an airsickness bag. "It was like I had no choice," Whipple told the Salt Lake Tribune.

Fortunately for public safety, the only person who witnessed Mr. Whipple's problem solving expertise was a flight attendant who promptly told the captain. The captain informed airport police in Salt Lake City who questioned Mr. Whipple upon his arrival.

So how should this story end? Should he be charged with indecent exposure and handed a lifetime ban on flying on SkyWest? Might he be required to wear a urine collection bag before flying again on any airplane? How about trauma counselling for the unfortunate attendant who witnessed Whipple's Whiz? What about the other passengers who might be suffering from Repressed Memory Syndrome because of Whipple's airborne improvisation?

Coyotepaws, those are all possibilities, but that's not what happened. Mr. Whipple and ol' Willy got themselves a taxi ride home, a letter of apology from Sky West and a future flight voucher. In its' apology, the airline said that they took off without replacing the light rather than inconvenience other passengers by delaying or canceling the short flight.

That had me shaking my head in disbelief. If I was the head honcho of SkyWest, I'd feed my arm to a grizzly bear before I would use it sign a letter of apology to Mr. Whipple. I would ground the whole darn airline before I would reward him for terminal stupidity.

That's why I wouldn't ever work in the airline business. I don't back up from the heavy going, but some jobs are just too damned hard.

Give my best to Mrs. Paws and the boys at the Market.

Your sidekick,
The old Prairie Dog

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