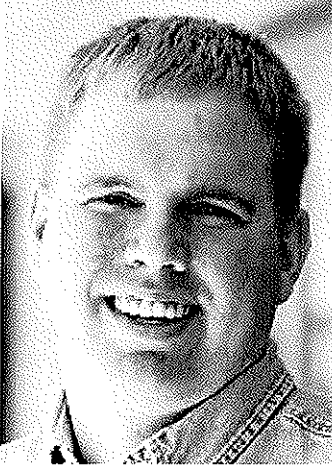


# HIS VIEW: Air travel leaves a lot to be desired

By Henry D. Johnston

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Johnston

Last week I flew to Yuma, Ariz., to drive my snowbirding grandmother home. Naturally an early riser, I was energized and eager to arrive at the Spokane airport to catch my 9:30 a.m. flight. That eagerness wore off when I was met with curt, rude and unhappy people from the minute I walked through the door.

Being an old-fashioned traveler, I checked in with the person behind the airline counter, not online or via one of those "do it yourself" kiosks. The process was quick but not too friendly. As I tried to make conversation with the desk agent, she just typed away on the keyboard and hardly acknowledged me until she handed me my boarding pass.

As I reached the security checkpoint, I was having a hard time finding my drivers license in my wallet. Stepping up to the counter, I smiled and chuckled to the agent behind the desk, "It shouldn't be this hard to find - it's not like there's any money blocking my access!"

No response, not even a smile or acknowledgment that I was there other than a hand held out to collect my boarding pass and ID. I found it, he checked it and then I was simply pointed to the next stop in the cattle run that is airport security.

After nearly stripping to my skivvies at the metal detector, I was led through one of those newfangled body scanners. Trying to lighten the mood a bit, I made a comment to the agent somewhere along the lines of "I hope the person on the other end likes what they see!"

That comment got me escorted off to the side where I was subjected to a rather rigorous and almost date-worthy groping. Once finished, I was told to collect my things and move along. Not wanting to risk any more searches, I withheld my comment about needing a cigarette after said pat down.

The terrible state of airport security aside, I did notice that two things are becoming very common when it comes to air travel.

First, nobody wants to make conversation with the person they're sitting next to. I always start by introducing myself and trying to engage my fellow passengers in conversation but am usually met with short answers and lack of eye contact.

Second, why even bother serving snacks and beverages if you're not going to allow your passengers to enjoy them? Not more than five minutes after they dispensed said snacks did the flight crew come back with the plastic bag trying to collect your cup and napkin. Can't I at least enjoy my shot glass of ginger ale a bit longer?

The most disappointing part of the whole experience was that I started my day with a positive and happy outlook and instead was met with so many hurdles of rudeness to overcome I was ready to go home and curl up in bed even before my plane landed. Adding insult to injury, I paid nearly \$300 to have this abuse heaped upon me and that wasn't even in first class!

No wonder that Jet Blue flight attendant went nuts some months ago. I would too if I had to deal with that much negative energy on a daily basis.

I certainly enjoyed the time spent with my grandmother as we trekked through the Southwest, making the drive across Nevada and ultimately winding up in Boise. No bad experience at the airport or on the airplane can outweigh the fun of playing the penny slots at each gas station we stopped at or the 1960s campiness of the El Capitan Resort & Casino in Hawthorne, Nev.

I guess my ultimate frustration lies with the fact that airlines run a very necessary and important service while also collecting a healthy sum of money from their passengers in the process.

So why can't the level of their service equal the price we pay them?

**Henry D. Johnston** lives in Moscow. He may be reached via email at [moscowmoderate@gmail.com](mailto:moscowmoderate@gmail.com)