

Flight 282

by Steven Weinraub

You have to understand, I am not afraid of flying in an airplane. As a kid, I loved the movement and motion of flying. But for the past fifty-five years, I haven't flown very often at all. This all started because of an incident that happened at the end of the summer of 1968.

I had just completed a long and extremely hot stretch as a playground leader on a park located at the west side of Dallas, Texas. Some of my kids and their parents held a party for me on the morning I was heading back to college in southern Indiana. There were lots of cakes and drinks, especially Dr. Pepper by the liter, the number one preferred drink in the state of Texas. And then I headed to the Dallas/Fort Worth airport to catch my flight back to Indianapolis. There was no TSA back then and no reason to be too early. I made Flight 282 just in time and forgot to go to any of the restrooms in the terminal before boarding the airplane. Once on the plane, I was so tired from not getting very much sleep the night before and from the festivities that morning, that I crashed and fell asleep as soon as I dropped into my seat and fastened my seat buckle. The flight was about two and a half hours.

After falling into a deep sleep for the first two hours of the flight, I woke up and realized that I was feeling the most urgent need to pee that I had ever experienced in my short life. I truly thought I was going to burst from the inside and die on that airplane if I did not get to the aircraft's lavatory immediately. So, I unbuckled my seat belt, got up from my seat and headed to the nearest unoccupied lavatory. And that is when I was confronted by the most callous flight attendant with very little patience for the likes of me.

"Get back to your seat and remain buckled-in," she sternly told me. Then she quickly grabbed the handset for the loudspeaker and announced to everyone on the airplane, "This plane is in its landing phase and federal regulations do not allow anyone to use the lavatory until the plane has landed and is stopped at the gate."

"I really need to go," I pleaded with her.

Her reply was forceful, "Get back to your seat. NOW!" She was so loud that everyone on the plane turned around and stared at me.

I do not remember what happened after that. My urgency had been overtaken by a deep feeling of shame and embarrassment. I basically disappeared into my thoughts. My body was non-existent. Did I faint or black-out or lose control of my bladder and pee on the airplane? I honestly have no memory of what happened afterwards, other than I was still alive and went on with my life.

Because of my horrific experience on Flight 282, years of anxiety followed which led to years of obsessive fear about getting back onto an airplane. If I did fly, no longer could I freely walk into an airplane lavatory and, as we say, feel the flow. Over the years, I have taught myself to drink absolutely no liquids on the day of a flight from the moment I wake up. Then when I am at the terminal, I pee three or four times to remove every drop of urine from my bladder before boarding the plane. It would be useless anyway for me to try to pee once I stepped over that line from the jetway onto the body of the airplane. Once that plane takes off, I am absolutely unable to pee in any airplane lavatory.

For fifteen years, between the ages of forty-five and sixty, I did not fly anywhere. If a trip by air was necessary, my wife had to go by herself. I just could not pee inside an airplane lavatory at thirty thousand feet.

Then, fifty-five long pee-shy years after Flight 282, my wife and I were invited to a bat mitzvah for her niece in the Chicago area. While flying from our home in Palm Springs to Chicago, I tried to pee on the airplane three times and each time I experienced a "non-fire." Nothing happened even though I felt that I had the need to pee.

Coming back from Chicago, I decided I was not even going to attempt to pee in the airplane's lavatory. I was just going to sit in my seat and force myself to wait until we had

gotten to Palm Springs. And since we were traveling west, this was going to be a four-and-a-half-hour flight!

But something unexpected and magical happened this time. My wife and I reached our assigned gate inside the Chicago airport terminal, so we sat and waited. Soon after we received notice on our airline app that our gate assignment had been switched. We stood up and moved to the adjacent gate. Then we got switched again, and so we moved accordingly. And then we got moved a third time, as yet another gate was showing on the app. We got up and walked over to the new gate and sat down. It was then that a flight attendant walked up to us and asked if this was the gate for the flight to Palm Springs. We confirmed it was, and she thought it amazing that we were in the correct gate before she was, as she was working on this particular flight.

The boarding began soon after, and I found my seat in Row 9, just behind the first-class section, and buckled myself in. The first hour went by and I had no sensation of having to pee. Two hours went by, and I was still pretty much okay. Three hours went by, and I stayed calm but began sensing a little anxiety whether I could make it or not. I said to myself, "*Power on, Steve, power on.*" At exactly the fourth hour I knew I had totally screwed up. I started to feel that same overwhelming sensation of urgency that I had felt so many years before. *Oh No!* I said to myself, *it's fifty-five years later and now I'm in the very same situation as before.* The pilot announced that the plane was in its landing phase into Palm Springs. The lights went on and the bells sounded signifying that the flight attendants should finish their duties and take their seats for landing. Everyone had to stay in their seats until the plane was at the gate. As for me, *I REALLY HAD TO PEE!* Being in Row 9, I was very close to the lavatory at the front of the airplane, but I knew its use was restricted to only those in first class. In fact, a curtain had been drawn separating my row from those more-expensive seats. So I did what I had to do and unbuckled my seat belt, got up and walked toward the back of the airplane from Row 9 all the way to Row 27. At that point, I was the only passenger standing up or walking down the aisle. And then I came face-to-face with that same flight attendant we had talked with earlier at the gate.

“What are you doing?” she said rather than asked. “Go back and sit down.” She whispered this to me softly, but at the same time her tone was stern, almost angry.

I looked at her with the pleading eyes of the Puss-in-Boots cat character in the movie Shrek. “I really, REALLY need to pee,” I whispered back with fear in my voice. “I promise I’ll hurry, and I’ll be buckled back in as fast as I can.” For whatever reason, her “follow-the-federal-government-rules” attitude changed. She must have remembered speaking with my wife and me at the gate before boarding. The hard lines on her face started to soften and then she said, “Oh, go ahead.”

“GO AHEAD!!!” That was uniquely different from how the flight attendant verbally abused and embarrassed me so many years before on Flight 282. I rushed into the nearest lavatory and locked the door behind me. *But, what if I can’t pee?* I asked myself. *I haven’t peed in an airplane lavatory since before that summer in 1968!* On top of my fear, the disgusting appearance of the overused aircraft toilet triggered another reason why I am inhibited from peeing in an airplane. *No!* I said to myself. *This time I know it will be different.* I mean I had 100% urgency to pee and right there in front of me I had unconstrained access to the toilet. I lifted up the wet seat, unzipped my pants, threw open the front flap of my underwear and freely PEEEEEEEEEDDDDDD. I PEED ON AN AIRPLANE!!!

And then I quickly cleaned up, unlatched the door, walked the long journey back to my seat, timing my balance with the movement and motion of the airplane landing, not caring who was looking at me and sat down and buckled myself in.

Wow, I thought to myself. Fifty-five years later and the very same scenario repeats itself. Except this time the flight attendant magically said “yes.” I cannot wait to fly again and try out my new-found prowess of peeing in an airplane lavatory.