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A few springs back, major U.S. airlines wanted to copy Southwest Airlines' style and policy to make a profit. Seems instead, the companies started charging for food and most beverages, banging up and losing baggage, and barreling up and down corridors and aisles, ignoring the public.

On one hand the airlines broke down the customer's will by counter intimidation and overbooking. On the other, the food carousels around the terminals sold sides possessing a toughening of will and way of wilted lettuce, cold bread, and limp meat concoctions powerful enough to make a goodwill emissary from Des Moines, Iowa swing his briefcase with the lash of a crocodile's tail at a boarding pass folded the wrong way.

In 2008, however, the FAA announced that Southwest was to be fined more than \$10 million for flying planes with "weak shells." The agency went on to confess to not being hard enough on all airlines' planes.

Had not recession news been so discouraging, it would have been a good time to sell parachutes and lifeboats around the terminals after the FAA admitted being lax. You never know. So many families were losing their homes, it's hard to guess whether a passenger was going to go for

freefalling aerial acrobatics and hang gliding into the ocean, or ask for a briefing on jerking rip cords aloft and bailing rubber rafts in high seas.

The San Angelo terminal only serves American Eagle and Continental. Our connection a week ago was for the 6:45 to Dallas. The flight was booked. The one familiar face was a ticket agent who confused my name from "Monte" to "Young Folk" following a "Hi." Mother's habit prepared for such a misnomer. For a long, long time, I thought "Go Outside and Play" was my name.

In no way was the salutation offensive. Such pressing matters as going through the strict security held the stage. Tension there increased when one of the officers inspecting my suitcase dropped the electric razor used for pruning my sideburns and trimming my beard.

The splat of it hitting the concrete made the line more jumpy. All turned out well. The gray hairs spilled on the floor matched the color of my beard, proving the razor was mine. The agent dignified the incident by saying, "I apologize, Mr. Noelke."

Steel chairs and stainless tabletops past security dramatize the cold seriousness of the process. The stress of going barefoot on the concrete in public excites a country fellow. Hard to look innocent and nonchalant with

your big toes so stiff from fright that the nails rake against the tongue when you put your shoes back on.

My pal always waits close by. For a rough idea of the time needed to reassemble my cloths and gear, imagine college kids passing by wearing flopping sandals, costumed in sheer clothing showing tattoos ranging from "The Last Supper" to "The Conquest of Hades by the Serpents" disappearing down the corridors before one shoe is replaced.

One new challenge was carrying a cell phone through security. My old phone weighed five pounds, including a black leather bag to rest on a pickup seat. Changes in the service forced buying a dinky little unit designed to be dialed with a sewing needle on a keyboard of letters the size of apostrophe marks. The second choice was ordering a new bag phone weighing three pounds, as handy as carrying an office typewriter along, or opting for the lightweight, side-mount between belt loops, and under stomach fold model, like I bought.

Ten feet away, with me deafened by the confusion, her warning to remember the cell phone transmitted from her lips. Having once lived in a stucco house with eight children in eight different stages of hi-fidelity rock music craze, it is no challenge to communicate by lip

reading with a flagpole sitter. I read her instructions to the letter.

Upstairs in the boarding area – or the starting gate – the namedropper from way back at the ticket check and boarding passes worked arranging wheelchairs and answering questions. His main task was to announce the new arrival times, meaning later arrival times.

Arrival times that pump adrenalin in surges more related to hoses connected to fire hydrants than valves, veins and arteries in a weary old body.

On a note pad, I began to jot down names with nothing particular in mind. Some examples: "Bacon Rind, Fat Back, Salt Jowl, Waddle Gait, and Chin Count." I lost focus after circling young folks, and began to recall flying from San Angelo in the days when we made up a near band of guys heading west to such spots as Phoenix or Denver or Albuquerque.

Thought of Wade and Jack, two guys always ready to stand a tap at the then small Dallas-Fort Worth Terminal. Remember the thrill of running into couples coming home from vacations. Forgot the insult of the exhausted, threadbare greeting. Pulled up after recalling having reported the same things happening in that very airport years ago.