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Where is all the glamour?

Working in the 'friendly skies'

The trip is almost over. The movies and food services have ended, and the headphones and trays have been picked up. A grumpy passenger demands two aspirin from the flight attendant, an inexperienced traveler moans, suffering from airsickness. The excitement of attending a flight can easily be seen, but the glory suddenly disappears.

Still, free travel and short work weeks have an appeal in a profession that can bring earnings of more than \$30,000 a year.

The benefits of the job set in, as the plane sets down for the first in a line of weekly trips — maybe to Hawaii where sun-soaked bodies lie on the beach and cool off with a dive into the waves. The next round of bidding could change the weekly destination to Tokyo, where bargain buys on rice cookers, jade jewels and other Japanese imports are hard to beat.

Adding to the thrill of flying are celebrities, prestigious business people and political big shots who often step on board.

This summary highlights some of one flight attendant's experiences in her 17 and one-half years with United Airlines. "It's not the glamorous job the books had written about. It's hard work. It's stressful — but it's the best job there is," says Trudy Kaufman, who started her career at age 20, after quitting a teaching job in New York.

Kaufman says competition has fiercely taken off in the airline industry, and that flight attendant work has grown much more demanding than it was when she started out. "You're not there to be cute. You're not there to be pretty. And if you don't work you're out."

"Back then it was in your manual — 'freshen your makeup.' We had little white gloves. We were really told to walk with both arms straight. 'Don't swing.' But if you did swing, your thumb must be always facing forward — and only the right arm could swing." Kaufman demonstrates as she stands, talking.

Regimented conditioning made a stewardess of the '60s prim and trim. Kaufman recalls her most vivid memory of flight training. "There was fantastic food at training, and we were weighed once a week officially," she says.

Since those days of training, such rules have loosened up a little, Kaufman says.

"It's all changed from the militaristic attitude to 'do your own thing,'" she says.

In fact, men, married women and women much over 30 weren't allowed to work as flight attendants for most airlines in the '60s. Not until the late '60s and early '70s when civil rights activists and flight attendant unions propelled the issue,

were these rules dropped; and the term "stewardess" was changed to "flight attendant."

Now both men and women well over 30 attend the needs of air travelers. "But most airlines have early retirement features for all posi-



tions, to keep the work force moving," says Jack Killian, who manages Alaska Airlines' flight attendants and has spent 29 years in the airline industry.

The two flight attendant veterans with Alaska have been with the crews for 30 years and are in their early 50s, earning \$30,000 a year, Killian says.

The incentive to stay with one company is acquired seniority, which only comes with years of experience at the same airline, Killian and Kaufman say. For instance, at Alaska, flight attendants get raises every six months. Those who have been with the company for five years receive wage increases once a year, Killian says. "You'll find flight attendants that start anywhere from \$700 a month to \$1,700 a month," he says.

Alaska Airlines start attendants at about \$1,200 a month, Killian says. Applicants for the job must be at least 21 years old, with two years of college and two years of customer service experience. Flight attendants must maintain their weight in proportion with their height, they must take a strength test and a medical exam, and they must know how to swim, says Linda Fielding, Alaska Airlines employment specialist.

At most airlines, applicants are narrowed down in a series of inter-

views, Killian says. For instance, Alaska receives about 20 to 30 applications a day. All applicants come for a group interview with about 25 others when the airline is hiring. This gives the personnel people a chance to get informally ac-

quainted with applicants and decide whether or not to call them back for a more formal, private interview, Fielding says.

Those who pass approval in the interviews then plunge into training.

At least 80 hours (two weeks) of emergency training are mandatory under the Federal Aviation Administration, but most airlines have three to six weeks of training, Killian says. The FAA monitors courses periodically, making sure a sufficient background is provided in first aid, CPR, air regulations, passenger regulations, evacuation and other emergency flight procedures.

Grooming, passenger and dining service and display are also taught in flight school. "It's pretty strenuous, pretty intense training," Martha Minter, manager of Alaska Airlines flight attendant training, says.

Each trainee receives hands-on experience, assisting crews on established commercial flights several times during the course.

Finally, students have their skills and abilities approved in an "operating experience flight."

"At this stage of the game, I've never had anybody not pass," Minter says.

In addition to the initial course,

the FAA requires flight attendants to have annual recurrent emergency training.

Following flight school graduation, most flight attendants go on "standby." They have guaranteed salaries for a certain number of flight hours a month and get paid for additional hours as well.

On standby a flight attendant may be called to fly anywhere at any time.

Kaufman began flying 85 hours of standby a month to and from New York, where she was based, to undistinguished Midwest cities. However, having entered the field when the demand for stewardesses was high, she moved from standby in three months and began flying regularly to flashy places like Las Vegas, Los Angeles and San Francisco — cities that sounded exciting and strengthened her seniority.

In Seattle, Kaufman's present base, starting flight attendants aren't so lucky, spending an average of 14 years on standby, Kaufman says.

Ranking as the 2,468th senior of the 10,500 United flight attendants in the United States, Kaufman can take her first choice route to Tokyo, where she flies to from Portland once a week. The attraction, she says, is flying on United's best equipment, with the best service, for the best pay. "Plus Tokyo is a romantic city," she adds.

But Kaufman learns about more than glamor in her weekly flights to the Orient, attending to both the prominent and the poor. "Right now we're dealing with a lot of refugees coming in from Cambodia," she says, explaining that the refugees are sent to America under church sponsorship.

"When they get off the plane with sandals and no coats, you have tears in your eyes because you know this is the land of dreams," she says.

Kaufman says the biggest challenge for her is being one of 12 attendants trying to assure 10 hours of comfort to over 400 passengers of varied backgrounds. One man may complain about the stuffy, smoky air, while a mother cradles her crying infant and a little girl spills her Coke.

"I can remember 12 years ago after a passenger had thrown up on me. I had cleaned up the passenger. I had cleaned up myself, and the passenger asked me 'What are you doing?'" Kaufman says.

She still recalls kneeling on the floor cleaning the mess and looking up at the passenger answering, "I'm looking for the glamour in this job."

Story by Lori Steinhauer
Graphic by Shawn Bird

At the movies

'Dangerously' gets dubbed a disaster

"Johnny Dangerously" should be given the dubious distinction of being this Christmas season's most unfunny comedy.

A spoof on 1930s gangster pictures, "Dangerously" stars Michael Keaton as a swell kid who takes up crime to pay for his mother's pancreas operation. He takes a liking to the gang and continues in the business (his mother continues needing operations), working with a swell crime boss (Peter Boyle) who soon gives the reigns of leadership over to Johnny.

Johnny's inevitable protagonist is the slimy hit man Danny Vermin (Joe Piscopo), a kid Johnny grew up with in the old neighborhood. Danny frames Johnny for murder and Johnny's own little brother, D.A. Tommy Kelley (Griffin Dunne), prosecutes the case. Gee, isn't this a scream?

"Johnny" is about as funny as a hernia. Keaton and Piscopo give okay performances, while the rest of the cast overdoes their slight characters. The script is simply awful though, full of hackneyed dialogue and unfunny jokes. Director Amy Heckerling compounds the problem with poor timing, telegraphing the slight gags from miles off.

We're supposed to laugh when Keaton breaks a jitterbug routine to start break dancing and when Piscopo utters his running joke "My mother did that to me once... Once!" Maybe this is a case of too many cooks, but between the four scriptwriters, not to mention script doctors Neal Israel and Pat Proft (a little conspicuously credited as Medical Advisors), you think someone could have thought up a genuine joke. Instead, we get Peter Boyle holding a detached flush handle after an explosion in his toilet whimpering because he thinks he's lost his family jewels. Yuk, yuk, yuk.

"Johnny Dangerously" has only one aspect reminiscent of the '30s. It has the wretched humor, bad dialogue and off-timing of a bad comedy common to the period.

By Sean Axmaker

Lecture, film scheduled

Documentary filmmaker Julie Reichert will be at the EMU Ballroom tonight for a lecture and discussion session following a return screening of her Oscar-nominated film "Seeing Red: Stories of American Communists."

Reichert is one of the most successful and acclaimed independent documentary filmmakers in America and "Seeing Red" has won awards at numerous film festivals worldwide.

Working with associate Jim Klein since 1970, Reichert has made numerous political and social documentaries, including "Union Maids," a study of labor struggles of the 1930s, and "Growing Up Female," a film about the socialization of the American female.

"Seeing Red," the latest film she and Klein have made, is an intimate look at the people who were members of the Communist Party in the 1930s. The film traces the initial idealism of the young American Communist Party and how the changing times affected public acceptance of the party.

A combination of recent interviews and vintage newsreel footage (with appearances by J. Edgar Hoover, Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan), "Seeing Red" is a personal look at a little-known historical movement and the people that belonged to it.

The Cultural Forum invites students to challenge the film and Reichert with prepared questions. The event begins with an introduction by Reichert at 7 p.m. The film is screened at 7:15 and a lecture and discussion will follow. The cost is \$1.50.

By Sean Axmaker

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