

The Lost *Art of Travel*



Bygone Era Douglas DC-3 Portuguese Air Mus

A shiny *Junkers Ju 52* monoplane glistens in the Kenyan sun, as it sits on the tarmac at Nairobi Municipal Airport. Its fuselage is fashioned from corrugated duralumin sheets, riveted together into a square-looking, ugly bird. Nose pointing to the sky and lowly tail wheel resting at the back, it looks as though its three radial engines (nose-mounted, left-wing, right-wing) could take it anywhere but to heaven. It is June, 1946 and Kenya still basks in its designation as a Crown Colony glittering among the globe-girdling possessions of the British Empire.

themselves long explanations. Her own mother, when Mum was a girl, would screech, "Don't eat cheese without bread; it will give you worms!" It was a simple mealtime admonition calculated to make the cheese last longer, at the expense of the much cheaper bread.

Our aircraft had been used for troop and cargo transport by the German *Luftwaffe* fighting the Allies in North Africa. With Germany's defeat in the North Africa campaign, the British had confiscated this *Junkers* and the Royal Air Force refitted it for passenger transport. I had never flown

After seven years in an enchanted land, we were leaving Kenya for good, and Cairo was our first destination on the way out of post-war, colonial Africa.

As we flew northward, following the Nile River, the co-pilot would step out of the doorless cockpit, every now and again. In full view of the passengers, he would operate a hand pump attached to the aircraft floor and vigorously pump oil into the engines. This was done several times throughout the flight.

Flying Nairobi to Cairo, non-stop, was out of the question in that propeller-driven era. Flight range was determined by the limited capacity of small wing tanks holding high-octane aviation fuel (aeroplane spirits, it was called then). And aeroplane spirits left no contrails in the heavens, so filmmakers, in those days, could be shooting a biblical epic and not fretting when their cameras needed to be tilted to the sky.

We broke our journey with an overnight stop in Khartoum. It was late afternoon when the aircraft touched down in Sudan's capital and the exit door was flung open. I was greeted by a blast furnace of Sudanese air, superheated to a temperature of 46°C. My bare skin had never imagined that air could get this hot. This certainly wasn't heaven; surely our pilot had made a navigational error and landed us in hell.

It was the very beginning of a long, hot summer north of the equator – the almighty equator, which reveals so much about one's surroundings on this Planet. I was a denizen of the Southern Hemisphere, for I was born just 90 miles south of that great dividing line. But Nairobi hardly ever got hot; it lay cool, tidy and smug at 5,500 feet above sea level.

Photo: A Fluehmann



Still Flying Junkers Ju 52 at Zurich Airport

the co-pilot would step out of the doorless cockpit, every now and again. In full view of the passengers, he would operate a hand pump attached to the aircraft floor and vigorously pump oil into the engines.

As my siblings and I clamber up the flimsy aluminium ladder to enter the belly of this ungainly people-swallower, I clutch my cotton teddy bear and press my mother for an answer:

"Mummy, where are we going?"

"We're going to heaven," she announces.

My six-year-old brain flooded with anxiety. I knew that only dead people went to heaven. I didn't want to go to heaven. I wanted to live. In those days, and even today, parents would sometimes frighten their children into silence and submission, thereby saving

in an airplane, so it did not seem odd that the 16 passengers sat facing each other on benches running along the walls of the fuselage. And the toilet at the back of the aircraft really was nothing more than a tin hut with a hinged door. There wasn't an air hostess, stewardess, cabin attendant or flight attendant in sight. If you hadn't brought your own bottled liquids on board, you stayed thirsty during the flight. In short, my cabin crew was my mum.

Heaven was still frightening me when the three noisy engines lifted us into the sky.



By equatorial standards, days were delightfully pleasant and nights were cold and an air temperature of 46°C existed only in bakers' ovens.

Dad had left earlier and was waiting for us in Cairo. A few days after our arrival we were driven far outside the Egyptian metropolis, into the seemingly boundless desert, to ride on a camel and a donkey for an elevated view of the Pyramid of Gizeh and the Sphinx. Cairo, then, had not yet spread its urban tentacles right up to the base of these timeless stone monuments. Some weeks later, a two-day train ride past Gaza took us from Cairo to Haifa, in the British Mandate of Palestine and from there we eventually made our way by road to Lebanon's chic and Eurocentric capital of Beirut.

Our final destination was Tehran, and so the next leg of the journey was a flight from Beirut to Baghdad. This time, our Iraqi Airways aircraft was an American-built twin-engine Douglas DC-3 "Dakota" with some 30 passengers on board, and Baghdad was about as far as the airplane's fuel tanks could get us. Arriving in the Iraqi capital for an overnight stopover, we were greeted by our local host at the foot of the plane's steps and escorted across the tarmac to a counter where Mum's passport was rubber stamped and our bags cleared from customs. Next day, the same DC-3 flew us over the Zagros Mountains of Iran and we landed at Tehran's airport.

As we clambered downhill, out of the slanted DC-3 – its nose, too, was pointed toward the sky while the tail wheel rested far below – Dad was there to meet us. Under the hot Iranian sun, we walked to the arrivals area for clearance. It consisted of three thatched-straw sun shades each supported by four wooden poles. I was stunned by the primitive simplicity of this air terminus: the entire airport was nothing more than a few open-air counters that resembled a dusty, windblown Persian bazaar.

I look back on that era of air travel, and ask myself: How is it that passengers in those days never needed 92 boarding gates, moving walkways, escalators, baggage carousels, driverless inter-terminal shuttles, incessant public address announcements,

blissful plainness of flying in a bygone era, unencumbered by mistrust and technologically enhanced vigilance. A smile, a handshake, a farewell wave and you enter the plane without a boarding pass and take your place in an unnumbered seat. My siblings and I were included in my mother's plain-paper passport, with two corners of her black-and-white photo primitively stapled to the first page. And how sweet was travel without the metal detectors. Our leather bags on board the aircraft had not been violated by a single quantum of X-ray radiation. Nor had my teddy bear endured a dark tunnel of infamy while grim-faced, uniformed security staff – trained in suspicion – inspected Teddy's innards on a CRT screen.

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Our bodies had not been sullied by the Magnetic Arch of Distrust, through which everyone today must pass – shoeless, purseless, beltless, nail clipper-free, and naked of any object which could afterwards trigger a magic wand that loudly squeals the metallic truth and identifies the offender as an arms-outstretched liar somewhere in the region of the crotch.

a dozen ID checks, TSA-compliant luggage locks, arrivals and departures TV monitors, self-service check-in systems, coin-swallowing luggage trolleys and face-mask dispensers, microchip-embedded passports, frequent flyer membership cards, executive club waiting lounges, and lost-luggage reporting facilities?

How unaware I was, at the time, that I actually had been flying in air-travel heaven. When I relive that early journey, I am struck by the

What a horrible way to treat law abiding travellers who wish to cover great distances while keeping their honour intact and their intentions transparent. The air pirates of yesteryear, the hijackers of the 20th century, and today's brain-deprived airborne terrorists have made virtually all of us guilty until proven flight-worthy. It's a shocking reversal of civilised travel and a contemporary statement on the human condition. ■

50something

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Kerri-Anne Kennerley says it's the growth of television – more TV, more jobs, more older female presenters. I like to think times are a-changing.

In a recent poll conducted by Wizard Jeans of the world's most beautiful women, four of the top ten were over 50: Kristin Scott Thomas, 50; Helen Mirren, 65; Catherine Deneuve, 67; and Sophia Loren, 76. Topping the list was Spanish actress Penelope Cruz, 36. (Of course, the British tabloids described them as "pensioners" – but that's another column.)

Then there's Meryl Streep who, interviewed by Vanity Fair on the release of her latest movie, said: "I'm 60 and I'm playing the romantic lead! Bette Davis is rolling over in her grave!"

Or Sharon Stone who, at 50, is still the face of Dior, despite being pulled from Chinese campaigns after her Sichuan earthquake "karma" comments.

The thing is, I'm not sure 16-year-olds tottering down the runway in mum's clothes and makeup win the dollar or precious time of independent women these days. Nor are they particularly interested in the opinions of commentators who themselves haven't lived and loved, struggled and lost.

Lately we're seeing a new guard of forty-plus women on our television screens – such as Tracey Grimshaw, 50, and Liz Hayes, 54. It's great to see they're no longer being pensioned off at 30. As a teenager I read Dolly magazine when Lisa Wilkinson,

now 50, was editor, and it's that history that keeps me a loyal follower.

That said, the closest we've got to the formidable Barbara Walters, 80, and legendary White House correspondent Helen Thomas, 89, is Michelle Grattan, 66, Canberra bureau chief of the Melbourne Age. When it comes to older female faces in the media, Australia has a long, long way to go.

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Award-winning journalist Nadine Williams recently retired from *The Advertiser* after an eclectic 20-year career. Her best-selling memoir, *From France With Love*, has sold the film rights to young Adelaide filmmaker, Peta Astbury. Nadine recently married her "lovely Frenchman", the hero of her book. www.nadinewilliams.com.au



Professor of Medicine at University of Sydney, Dr David Hunter is a rheumatologist epidemiologist. He has over 170 peer reviewed publications in international journals and recently completed his second book on self management strategies for the lay public. In is currently researching the epidemiology of osteoarthritis and novel therapies in disease management.



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Thomas E. Muller was born in Kenya and, 70 years on, he again lives south of the Equator. "My destiny lies in the Southern Hemisphere," he says. The retired professor now explores the Planet as a freelance travel writer. His adventures are featured on www.ThePlanetaryPrize.com