

MY AIRLINE

BY DAVID OWEN

Luggage surcharges are old news at my Airline. I've had them for years: for second bags that don't contain golf clubs, for cardboard boxes held together with twine or duct tape, for long, rolled-up things that you bring into the cabin, and for any carry-on item that I have to help you stow or retrieve, or that you jam into the overhead compartment sideways, so that it crushes my sports coat, which I have folded using the time-tested inside-out method, or whose size forces me to place my briefcase in a compartment other than one directly over my row. The charge is fifty dollars, exact change only. From now on, I will also be charging fifty dollars for any piece of luggage on which you have written your name and address in gigantic letters.

Previously, at check-in, I have visually estimated your weight. From now on, you may be required to step onto the luggage scale. You must also certify, before boarding, that no part of your arm or torso will extend over your armrest and touch me or cause my arm or side to get hot at any time during the flight. If the test calipers at the boarding gate cannot be passed freely over your entire body, you will be required to purchase an additional ticket and to sit in the exact center of your two seats. Furthermore, you must keep your feet stowed directly in front of you at all times in such a way that your legs do not touch my legs or penetrate any part of the imaginary vertical plane separating your seating space from mine. Fifty dollars.

Staring blankly at the seat back in front of you for the entire flight is no longer permitted on my airline. If you have brought nothing to read, a book will be provided for your use, at a charge of fifty dollars. Flipping through the airline magazine or the duty-free catalogue in your seat pocket is allowed only while the aircraft is on the ground and other reading matter is temporarily inaccessible. You may no longer hum or do any form of beadwork. If you wish to attempt a Su-

doku puzzle during the flight, you must demonstrate to my satisfaction that you realize that the nine spaces in every row and column must each contain a unique digit, and that the nine squares that make up the over-all Sudoku square cannot be completed without consideration for how they fit into the entire puzzle. Do you understand this? No? Fifty dollars.

Laughing out loud at anything in any movie, whether it is playing on the cabin system or on your own DVD player, is fifty dollars per incident. Asking me to turn off my reading light so that you can see the screen better: also fifty dollars.

If you and your spouse are dressed almost identically, or if you are carrying your passport in a thing around your neck, or if you are wearing any form of footwear or pants that you clearly purchased specifically to wear on airplanes, or if you make it obvious (by repeatedly turning around and talking to passengers in seats not adjacent to yours) that you are travelling with a group, the charge is fifty dollars.

As always, tipping back in your seat is fifty dollars, payable to the person sitting behind you, unless you are sitting in front of me, in which case the charge begins at a hundred dollars and my permission is required. Ask nicely, and if we can agree on a figure I will ask a flight attendant to unlock your seat.

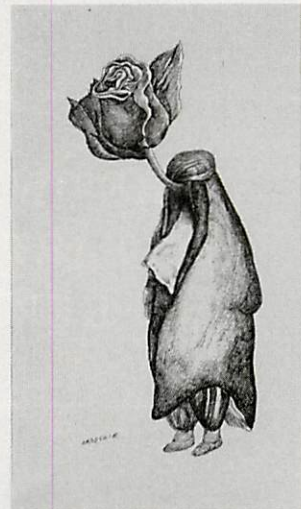
I don't serve meals on my airline anymore. Get over it! What's the matter—you can't last two hours without chicken parmigiana? Why are you even going to Indianapolis? If you don't like waiting in the terminal while your aging aircraft is being repaired, I suggest that you go to the Hertz counter, rent a Hummer, and spend the next five days driving to San Diego. Are you aware that it took Ben Franklin more than a month to travel from Philadelphia to Paris? No, you may not have the entire can.

I realize that you have a choice of airlines, and I encourage you to exercise it. In the meantime, please enjoy the flight. ♦

Ardeshir Mohassess

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Ardeshir Mohassess. Untitled. 1978. Collection of Malayoun Beglari-Scarlett and Peter Scarlett. Photo: Richard Lee



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