

## A life and time of opportunity

When I was first hired as a "stewardess" by United the end of 1965, I had no idea of the way it would change my life. Back then when mass aviation was first starting, it was the golden age for air travelers and also for the crews. You were noticed as being special; zipped through customs and had transportation waiting to transfer you to your hotel check-in. You leisurely got to meet and talk to the upper edge of society; had long layovers in exotic places....and even had some privileges of the rich and famous. At that time, few expected flying to become a lifetime career. But the advantages of a flexible schedule and decent pay, soon made it the most sought after job for almost any female in America. Seniority was everything! From more days off each month, to prime vacation slots, to trading flights, to laying over in the best places or even working in the non-smoking cabin....seniority was everything. I was one of the lucky few who rode the crest of being "senior" for almost of my career. Even though I was at the bottom of the group the whole time, my position was good enough to give me many of the opportunities that the job had to offer. But I can't say that I was ever senior enough- even after 38 years! On my last flight before retiring, I was going to Beijing on a 747. Eighteen crew and I was the most junior on board. Most junior, makes me laugh. And now before we all laugh at the old, the ugly, the fat and the rude flight attendants of today, let me refresh your memory as to why we are on the plane in the first place. We are paid to be there for YOUR safety. And in that respect I say, job well done. I never had any real problems during all my years of flying. I like to think that a lot of that was diverted by being alert and diffusing situations that could become dangerous. I never forgot that 30,000 feet in the air is always serious business! Yes, cooking, serving and cleaning up for 300 passengers in less than two hours is serious too. Imagine not getting things locked away before landing- yes that happened. Or having a full load of angry people be coming aggressive because of being hungry, cramped, sick, scared, drunk or on drugs! The usual. And between the lifting, stretching and bending, each flight was also a physical workout. Of course all that while working in tiny spaces and balancing oneself in a moving vehicle and sometimes with clear air turbulence! But it all seemed to work for me. The long, long working hours, traveling through as many as 17 time zones, eating unrecognizable food, being lost in new places, always having the wrong clothes for the weather- no problem. Benefits were always there to be found.



I met movie stars and rock stars. I met diplomats and government officials. I even got to be shake the President's hand and be inside Air Force One. I got tickets to fancy events, gifts and a special tours of other cultures. Layovers in unique cities gave me the chance to see and go places on the company's money. Previous crews gave us information of where to find the best deals and hidden treasures that only the locals knew where to find. Coming from a background of almost nothing....to me it was blue skies all the way. It was my time to bloom and I made the most of it. Other highlighted memories are when I had dinner with Beverly Sills opera star. And my son climbing on the lap of Barbara Eden- star of I Dream of Jeannie. Meeting Bill in Hong Kong. Oh, and being in a hijacking! Back then they usually just wanted to go to Cuba. No one wanted to kill anyone even though having a rifle pointed only three feet from me was a bit scary. But then....those are all different stories in themselves. I am retired now and comfortable with a decent pension and good benefits. I still make the most of every day and still love to travel as much as possible. It was an education that one cannot get from a book. Traveling was like reading a book with all five senses. I could see, smell, taste, feel and hear a new world opening up to me. I look back now and it all seems like another persons life so very long ago. A journey in a time and place of adventures and opportunity. It's as good as it gets.