

Please, Fasten Your Seatbelts

In America every citizen is guaranteed a high amount of rights and autonomy while existing within the country's borders. To a certain degree, we basically get to do whatever we want whenever we want to. We pee when we want, we eat when we want, and we sleep when we want. Sure there are obstacles that are placed to stop us from realizing our desires at the exact moments we want them gratified, such as social codes and famine, but other than that our country guarantees our pursuit of happiness.

However around 100 million citizens every year forgo these rights and submit themselves to the will of an omniscient and all-power force without giving it a second thought. What gives this force the right to control so strongly without a single question being raised? Where are the uprisings and rebellions meant to displace this oppressive entity? It seems that they are simply a flickering hope that lives inside my head each and every time I hear that Pavlovian-chime signifying that it is time for all passengers to fasten their seatbelts.

Six years ago I went to London with my family. My dad is constantly frequenting overseas for lectures, performances, and all the other imaginable professional allures for an art professor abroad. Sometimes my mother, sister, and I would get lucky enough to join him on this ventures, getting to soak in the sights and sounds of distant lands as my dad shuffled from conference room to art opening.

I've flown United, American, Continental, Atlantic, Delta, Southwest, and Korean Air Canadian Air, Swiss Air, British Airways, and Lufthansa, all adding to well over a month's worth of perpetual airtime. Each and every time it's the same reassuring routine: you arrive at the airport and check you and your bags in, head on through security, sit on the plane for a couple

hours or so, arrive at your destination, retrieve your bags, and exist. Something about its monotony is sort of reassuring for me when I'm flying thousands of miles above the ground. It doesn't matter the airline, it doesn't matter the country: everything is always the same.

There are people standing anxiously in front of the gate, checking their watches, zipping up their bags. A cool female voice had just entered over the intercom announcing the start of first class boarding, inspiring the group economy class flyers to surge towards the gate, all hoping to be the first one to be able to start accustoming their legs to the crap quarters of airplane seating. They stood intently watching the face of the intercom lady as if proper anticipation of the announcement for economy class boarding would ensure the smoothest and quickest boarding procedure.

And slowly the people began funneling through the long and winding passage that led into the plane's body, with snippets of cold and crisp air poking through the passageway's cracks.

A woman with a bright wide smile greeted me when I entered the plane, ushering me into the warm and welcoming arms of her fellow attendants. I nodded feebly as I was shoved into descending the aisles as to not cause a traffic jam for those wishing to enter the plane. I walked past the first class seats, imitations of small beds, and the business class, enough legroom for the common man, straight into the back.

In our tiny little row on this great big airplane I was able to choose any seat I wanted. There was the aisle seat promising freedom to my right side. There was the middle seat that promised the warmth and comfort of resting my head in my mother's lap. And there was the window that promised a view of small mountains, small cities, small countries below. I choose the window.

The airline was new, different than the others. “Virgin Airlines,” my mom had told me when I had asked her once again for the name of the flight. It was a big plane, with three seats on the sides and four in the middle. The sounds and snuffles of all of the passengers meshed together into a single chorus of background white noise. But even though it housed what seemed like thousands of people, the plane provided each and every one of its sacred travelers a small personal so that they could have full control over what entertainment they experienced on their journey.

As we sat waiting for all of the passengers to cycle into their seats, a preview video for the entertainment system ran on loop. “Welcome to Virgin Airlines” it began. There were clips of smiling faces interspersed with cartoon confetti and dancing squiggly lines. And at the end was a clip reel featuring the films of the flight with various random facts. Téa Leoni was seriously injured when she dived over a countertop in Fun with Dick & Jane. Tilda Swinton hadn’t read the book before starring in The Lion, The Witch, & the Wardrobe. At the very end the words “AND MUCH MORE” filled up the screen, sending shocks of excitement up and down my spine. I could not wait to explore the electronic world that awaited me.

Soon every passenger had been seated, every bag had been stowed, every seatbelt had been buckled, and all tray tables were in the upright position. I looked over the tops of the seats in order to spy on a flight attendant down the aisle, presuming about to give the safety instruction. Your seat can be used as a floatation device. Make sure that if you are seated in an exist aisle that you are willing to perform the duties listed. Secure the oxygen max on your face first, before helping others.

But it did not come. The flight attendant stayed with his back turned to us, shoulders slouching up and down as he chatted furiously away to another seating in front of him. I gave up

on watching and slumped down in my seat, beginning to consider the best body configurations to receive maximum comfort and maximum relaxation. Face forward, legs on ground. Leaned against window, legs on chair pocket. Leaned against window, legs on mom and sister. On ground.

The murmur of voices was become more and more distinct over the hum of the air conditioning. Throughout the plane faces kept panning from the front to the back of the plane, searching for someone to explain how to properly tighten a seatbelt. Waiting for their reminder that this was a nonsmoking flight. They wanted their smile and thanks for choosing Virgin Airlines. But it wouldn't come. 30 minutes had passed since the last passenger had boarded and it still hadn't come. The video loop still continued reminding me once again of Téa Leoni's bruised hip.

And then finally the soft ba-ring of the airplane intercom sounded, drafting a silence among all of the passengers. Everyone waited, withheld breaths. "We are sorry to inform you, but there has been a delay," the cheery voice spoke out of the monitor, "we are hoping to fix this issue in the next 30 minutes, but until then please feel free to enjoy our in-flight entertainment service!" and as if she had spoken a magical incantation, the television screens sparked to life. Hundreds of titles lay before me, each and every one a choice able to pass the time. But I was already too preoccupied to enjoy the film diversity. About two weeks prior to the flight I had seen the movie Final Destination for the first time. Now connected the dots between that movie and my own current airline issues was not a fun process in my head, but rather a fairly unnerving one. What if there was something wrong with the engine and it didn't get fixed properly? What if our plane went plummeting into the Earth halfway through the flight? Who would take care of my dog if that happened? I tried to share my fears to my mother, but she had just begun Memoirs

of a Geisha and I did not feel like interrupting. Instead I resorted to flipping through the movie titles to try and ignore my looming doom.

“I’m sorry for the delay, but we are working hard to fix the issue and we should be starting our takeoff within the next 30 minutes,” said the same cheery voice as before. Two hours had passed since the last passenger had been seated. Both of my feet were asleep. My body ached from being shoved tight-packed vacuum-sealed into my little window seat. Outside my window I could see the ground, the harbor, the Coronado Bridge. I was on the ground, and yet it was as good as thousands of miles away.

Soon the AC had stopped working. Actually I don’t know if it was the AC that had stopped working, or if it was the courtesy and just treatment of the passengers on behalf of the flight attendant that was had stopped working.

5 hours had passed since the original display time for departure and yet there had still been no movement. No explanation for the perpetual paralysis in utero on the runway. There was no attempts to move forwards towards progress, nor were there attempts back to rectify mistakes. Instead we were told that things would be fixed soon as long as well all remained in our seats.

A collective groan sounded throughout the cabin. The power had gone out, momentarily, restarting the entire in-flight entertainment service. The sudden shortage did not affect me, as I was too focused on trying to will my body to sleep when I possessed no exhaustion. So far it wasn’t going to well as I was only able to make myself yawn loudly. Tilda Swinton was back on the screen again. My mom tapped me on the shoulder and I took my head phones out of my ears.

“Did you know that about Tilda Swinton?” she asked me, looking me with such a serious intent that I could have sworn that she was hoping my answer would solve all of her questions in life.

So I just grunted and rolled back into the window, gazing back out at the mild-tempered Eden that was slowly fading into the evening. The plane had been distorted all of my perceptions of time the longer I sat on it. 60 seconds on the plane was equal to around 210 seconds in the real world. As I sat crumpled in my seat it was almost as if I could quantify my aging before my eyes.

The plane was full of stale air and screaming babies and yet nothing was done. As time dragged on, 6 hours in, 7 hours in, 8 hours in, we passengers kicked and screamed and yelled and panicked. We took the chair in front of us, ripped it open, and threw it out the window. We knocked over bags and pushed over the food carts. We turned the airplane into full scaled pandemonium.

We would not take this! The cool calm expressions from the superior flight attendants smiling down on our little outbursts asking if we would like a cup of water. Demeaning! Belittling! We would ask them question after question but receive the same reply, "Any minute, don't worry! We'll be moving in any minute." So we trashed the plane, tearing it apart to let out our woes and frustrations. We would not take the insincere and mechanized emotions of sky law, where we the passengers were now fully submitted to the greater powers of pilot and crew.

All we wanted was to get out. Our freedom was visible, dark now, just on the other side of the plane wall. A nice comfy bed. A hamburger dinner. All commodities that were no so far gone, so far lost. So we screamed and shouted and shrieked and tore until our feelings of trapped resentment felt more exposed to all those around us.

But then, 9 hours in the simple ba-ring sounded telling us to return to our seats. I looked around the airplane: nothing was in disorder or disarray. The flight attendants walked down the aisles reminding passengers about seatbelts and tray tables and the passengers looked back up at

them with big smiling faces. My mom whispered a side remark to my dad about the inefficiencies in flying, and then smiled up at the flight attendant to thank her for her hard work.

I had been marooned and abandoned by a band of rebels, forced to sit down accept our prior fate. My legs were sore, almost to the point where they felt like they would fall off. I was bored, sustained activity in cramped quarters for longer than 20 minutes is very difficult. And I was upset, upset that I had been sitting on an airplane for 9 hours. Upset that I couldn't just go outside and run and breathe the air and feel the sun and appreciate how nice and how beautiful it is to truly stretch out your legs. And I was upset that I now had 15 more hours to London to look forward to.

So please, make sure that your seat back and tray table are in the upright position. Turn off all electronics including iPods, laptops, and cell phones and only turn them back on when the captain turns of the seatbelt sign after we have taken off. Only preapproved electronic devices may be used.

And finally, oh please, we must not forget, fasten your seatbelts.