

Learning While Flying

By Chris Hirschhorn

In the early 1950s, when my work called for me to travel from New York City to Washington, DC or New York City to Louisville, Kentucky for instance, I had to travel by train because in those days, flying was military.

However, in the late 1950s, business men and women began to book flights. In those days, on long flights, stewardesses would give you a choice of what you wished to eat – usually beef or chicken – and they'd prepare your meal and serve it, not on paper plates with plastic cutlery, but on porcelain plates with metal cutlery. You would eat, not in your assigned seats, but in the rear of the plane in the dining area.

Considering the freedom that women have in today's world, it is indeed strange to think of what business women went through in the States in the 1950s. For instance, on my Louisville KY account, when I needed to test my IBM 650 programs, I needed to cross the state line to Illinois where they had an up-and-running IBM 650. In those days, a woman couldn't borrow a state car and drive it across the state line. I was told that civilians who saw a woman driving a state car would think the woman was a state employee's girlfriend and they would complain to the State. So I had to have two men drive me to my test site in Illinois.

Overseas, in Nepal in Asia in 1968, few people flew. You could tell by the smallness of the airfields. My husband, an American friend and I did many a day hike in the mountains so we could view the daily life of Nepalese families. With help of local Sherpas, we tented and ate by our fireside along the way.

We had arranged to fly back to Katmandu, Nepal's capital at the end of our three-day hike. There was no building for us to wait in. But there was a tiny shack the size of three telephone booths. Waited in this space. It was chilly. The men waited outside. We were collected by a four-passenger plane and flown back to Katmandu.

Once on a holiday flight from St. Petersburg, Russia, to Tbilisi at the Black Sea, my husband and I experienced Russian pilots and their wild flying. Quick turns in the sky and quick ups and downs. Both my husband and I were often sitting with clenched hands and I was praying. Aside from the Russian flyers and their air gymnastics, I want to say that the Nepalese and Russians that we met were all so helpful and so cheery that we hated to bid them goodbye.

In Tbilisi, my husband and I met Doctor Kourishvilli who was also visiting Tbilisi. He invited us to be special guests at the Russian Doctors banquet that evening. We formed a threesome and when he was passing through New York City, he phoned us to say "Hi". Unfortunately he had no time to meet with us in New York.