

Some Laughed, Some Cried . . .

by Bill Gould

Bill Gould, supervisor of inflight services, JFK, was a member of the supervisory cabin team aboard the 707 dispatched by TWA to Gander, Newfoundland to pick up 35 passengers released by the hijackers of F355 and fly them to Chicago. Bill previously wrote an article for the Skyliner relating his experience as a crew member during TWA's airlift of Vietnamese refugees to the U.S.

As September 11 dawned in Gander, Newfoundland, the morning was clear and crisp. A group of 35 passengers crossed the ramp towards our 707. They were weary and their emotions—we perceived—ranged from great relief to tense nervousness; from angry concern for their 52 fellow passengers still held hostage to embarrassed happiness.

Many times during our journey from Gander to Chicago, their original destination, we would witness changes in the emotions of these people. As we heard their accounts of the skyjacking of Flight 355, the events of the preceding night's ordeal began to unravel and the pieces began to fall into place, revealing a story that could easily have been a Hollywood script of the plot of a bestselling novel. But reality was stranger than fiction.

Gaspare Cappello, Donna Richardson, Paul Broderick and I were the cabin team who volunteered to go with Captain C.D. Woods, first officer Tom Ashwood and flight engineer Harry Oakley to return the released 35 to Chicago. At the time that we left JFK, we had no idea that we would become involved in the unfolding drama by being the ones responsible for seeing that the hijackers' demands were met: the dropping of leaflets in Montreal, Chicago and New York.

Our immediate mission was the care of our passengers. It became a full-time concern, for each of the 35 reacted differently to the experience (providing, incidentally, a fascinating study in human behavior). Those reactions may be helpful to those of us who might be, at some future time, involved in a similar situation.

Personalities began to emerge immediately as our passengers boarded the aircraft. Some embraced us and shook our hands; others just smiled wearily, the relief obvious on their faces.

For our part, we listened as freely as they spoke. They wanted to talk; get it out of their systems. Although they were exhausted, very few tried to sleep. The adrenalin was still flowing, and they worked it off in different ways. Some partied, celebrating their release. Some gathered in small groups and discussed the fate of the others still on 355. One man wept. He felt guilty that he was now safe and others were not. He agonized over this, but in the end, when we arrived in Chicago, he seemed to have made peace with himself and was smiling happily.

The strangest things can happen to set off the release of emotion when people are tense and afraid. While walking down the aisle, I noticed a young lady reading a book and I asked if she had gotten much reading done the night before. She burst into tears. I sat down with her and her story flowed out in a gushing tide of emotion. She was from Mexico City seeking a job in New York with the U.N. (which she had secured) and had been on her way to Chicago with a friend to celebrate.

For one young man, Keith Jones, the hijacking made his sixth birthday memorable. We made a birth-

day cake for him out of breakfast cakes and the whole plane sang Happy Birthday. For a birthday present, we pinned TWA wings on him and gave Keith, his mother and his 18-month old sister the honor of being the first to deplane at Chicago.

I will never forget the expression on the face of a Chinese couple when I asked them in Mandarin whether they would care for some tea. Until this point they had said very little; suddenly they came alive, and we talked in Chinese about everything from the hijacking to restaurants in Taipei. The conversation ended, as so many did on that flight, with an exchange of addresses and invitations.

Also on board was a young lady traveling to Chicago to meet her prospective in-laws for the first time. She was most concerned about her appearance since her luggage was on its way to Paris at the time.

And that was not the only wedding in the making. One couple were on their way to their son's wedding, to take place at two o'clock that afternoon. When we arrived in Chicago, I remarked it looked as though they would make it in time, and the man replied that he would even have a chance to shower and shave.

And so it went from Gander to Montreal to Chicago. As we looked after the comfort of our passengers, we saw their individual personalities emerge. People who had boarded the flight in New York the previous night as strangers were now like a family, having shared a crisis. All the while we catered to their needs, we too changed roles as their needs of the moment dictated: flight attendant, friend, counselor.

As our 707 departed Chicago for New York we were, ourselves, a weary group. Most of us had been up for over 30 hours. I took a moment to reflect about our jobs in inflight services. The experience and training we each received had enabled us to sense these peoples' needs and take care of them. I realized, perhaps for the first time, how much I personally have gained from a flying career.