



## FEVER DREAMS

In reconsidering the meaning of travel, three writers get personal. But during a global lockdown, their words reverberate universally.

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## COME FLY WITH ME

As travel restrictions keep much of the world grounded, **JENNY HEWETT** reflects on why she's longing for the journey rather than the destination.

**M**OST EIGHTIES KIDS I knew grew up riding their bikes through the bush. My experience of that world was short but sweet. I was eight when my family packed up our suburban Canberra existence for the rushing sights and smells of post-war Seoul in the early nineties. And as an “expat brat,” many of my childhood memories were formed in the sky.

Flying made me feel safe. The places on either side of the journey were new and strange, but being on planes, and the ritual of coming and going, was a familiar world. My sense of adventure thrived, because I shared the experience of excitement and anticipation within the safety net of my family unit—my one constant. So since air travel came to a grinding halt and the aviation industry braces for recovery, I find myself nostalgic for the journey, my head and my heart in the clouds.

Air travel—its ease, frequency and accessibility—is something that many of us, until recently, took for granted. The average number of flights per day in 2019 was 188,901, and July 25, 2019, was the busiest day in aviation history according to Flightradar24. Prior to the pandemic, we were quick to complain about long-hauls and the inconveniences that can go along with them. But as became immediately obvious during lockdown, such inconveniences are actually privileges, depending on your perspective. Hemmed into your house on day 4,325, who among us wouldn't have rather been going through airport security?

It's with great appreciation that I've been looking back on the occasions that are now unheard of: the times my sister and I were invited, mid-flight, to sit behind the pilots in the cockpit of a cruising 747. And the cocktail party that my parents, other passengers and British Airways staff enjoyed for hours while our plane was delayed on the tarmac in Hong Kong. Neither

would fare very well in the new era of tightened security or social distancing.

When I was a kid, dressing for the plane was its own occasion. To this day, I can't bring myself to wear loungewear while flying, because my sister and I were taught to be respectful of the opportunity, which also meant looking our best. Now we poke fun at my Dad, who still always wears his sports jacket to travel, even in economy.

I once referred to myself as the Benjamin Button of air travel, in that I flew at the pointy end of the plane more as a child than I ever will as an adult. Technology has greatly improved the passenger experience, but I look back on those days with fondness. Flatbed seats had not yet been invented; instead we got excited about oversized armchairs that reclined to 45 degrees. Movies were on demand, but only in the literal sense. I was 10 the only time I flew first class, and I vividly remember cabin crew handing me the *Home Alone 2* mini VHS cassette to load into the personal playback unit.

I'm not a kid anymore, but I still get excited on planes. Last year traveling from Dubai to Sicily, the pilot enthusiastically announced that we were flying over Egypt and to look out the left side of the aircraft. There below us, like giant gold Valentino studs, were the Pyramids of Giza. A moment I will never forget.

COVID-19 is likely to be as much a catalyst for change in aviation as 9/11 was, even as the “how” of it remains up in the air. I spent the majority of quarantine back home in Australia, with my parents, lamenting the trips the pandemic has claimed. But my sister and my nieces are living on the other side of the world and it's not clear when we'll be able to reunite. Flying brought us together as a family, but it's the one thing that now keeps us apart. The journey was a routine part of my life, and while I've accepted that things won't be the same again, I'm impatient for its return. I'd even tolerate a small human kicking the back of my chair, just for the opportunity to be up there. ✦

