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Flight attendants.  
It's a hard life."  
—Marisa Wegrzyn

# Life in the Sky

By Kellie Mecleary, Production Dramaturg

Beth, Sam, and Angie are part of a profession with a lot of baggage. These pages offer an overview of both the history of flight attendants and the facts of flying today—from glamorous icons to the faces of labor to the brunt of passenger air rage.

**1933: An icon is born** America had a new icon of femininity, declared the *Toledo Sunday Times*: the airline stewardess "has been eulogized, glorified, publicized, and fictionalized during her comparatively short existence... She seems to be on the way to becoming to American girlhood what policemen, pilots, and cowboys are to American boyhood."

**1930:** Stewardesses, or "air hostesses" as they were then called, were required to retire if they married or became pregnant.

**1943: What more could you want?** No wonder stewardesses received such favorable attention from the press and the public. As a female writer for *Independent Woman* admiringly concluded, they exuded "the skill of a Nightingale, the charm of a Powers model, and the kitchen wisdom of a Fanny Farmer"—an ideal blend of traditional and modern femininity.

**1936:** A *New York Times* article described job requirements thus: "The girls who qualify for hostesses must be petite—weight 100 to 118 pounds; height 5 feet to 5 feet 4 inches; age 20 to 26 years."

**1955: Playboy's "Miss December"** United stewardess Barbara Cameron posed for *Playboy* as "Miss December" in 1955. She appeared again exactly three years later as "The Girl Next Door" in the line-up of "most popular Playmates," marking the magazine's fifth anniversary. This was a notable departure from the respectable stewardess mystique of the postwar era.

**1953:** Flight attendants had to retire by age 35.



**1965: A showgirl or jet-propelled waitress?** The jet age, with its crowded, speedier flights and more motley passenger population, posed a new challenge to stewardesses' glamorous image. As a female reporter for the *Des Moines Register* wittily suggested: "The airline stewardess, 1965, has one of the most frustrating jobs in the world. Male passengers expect her to look like a Las Vegas showgirl, and are angry when she doesn't. Female passengers are angry when she does, and are fond of calling her a 'flying waitress.'"





**1979: "No More Stewardesses—We're Flight Attendants"**

When feminist writer Louise Kapp Howe profiled stewardesses in the traditional women's magazine *Redbook*, she presented them as symbols of women's new assertiveness in the workplace. As Howe and others made clear in the national media, "stewardesses" had become "flight attendants" in the feminist 1970s and began to muster more respect as workers (and militant ones at that).

**1974:**

Courts ruled that female flight attendants must be paid no less than their male counterparts.

**1978:** Congress passed the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, protecting flight attendants, among other workers, from pregnancy termination policies.

**1993: The New Face of Labor** With federal deregulation of airline fares and routes in 1978, price slashing, start-ups, rapid expansion, and mergers wracked the industry. One notable side effect was that the news media began to pay attention to flight attendants as unionized workers with great potential for militancy, rather than as staple subjects for "human

**1991:**

American Airlines resolved a lawsuit by relaxing standards of weight for flight attendants, permitting a 5'5" female flight attendant younger than 25 to weigh up to 133 pounds. (Previously, the same flight attendant could weigh no more than 129 pounds.) The new weight restrictions increased with age; between 40 and 44, the same flight attendant could weigh up to 145 pounds.

interest" stories. When American Airlines flight attendants carried out a highly successful 11-day strike in 1993, nearly shutting down the nation's then-largest carrier at the time, both *Time* and *U.S. News & World Report* portrayed them as the "new face of Labor."

**2001:**

After September 11, many flight attendants took pay cuts to keep the airlines in business.

**2010:**

Salaries for flight attendants at United Airlines were the same as in 1994, but with fewer benefits.



**FACTS ABOUT FLIGHT ATTENDANTS TODAY: DID YOU KNOW THAT...**

Of all applicants for flight attendant positions, between 5% and 10% are accepted.

40% of flight attendants are 50 or older. Fewer than 18% are 34 or younger.

Most airlines hire flight attendants no shorter than 5'3" and no taller than 6'1". Weight must fall within a specified range of proportionality to height.

The Federal Aviation Administration requires one flight attendant per 50 passengers. Most airlines do not choose to exceed this minimum.

On-the-job injury rates for flight attendants are comparable to those for construction workers or miners.

Flight attendants are required to maintain a high standard of personal grooming and may not have any visible tattoos.

Burnout rates for first-year flight attendants are as high as 90%.

Flight attendants get paid for "flight hours only," meaning the clock doesn't start until the craft pushes away from the gate.

# FURIOUS FLYERS

## Examples of Air Rage

- ✈ An enraged passenger heaved a suitcase at a customer service agent who was eight months pregnant.
- ✈ A flight attendant was knocked to the ground and kicked after informing a hungry passenger that there were no extra sandwiches.
- ✈ A man punched a pilot in the boarding area when he was informed that his flight was cancelled.
- ✈ A Saudi Arabian princess was sentenced and fined for choking a flight attendant.
- ✈ After being denied a first-class upgrade, a passenger threw a full pot of coffee at a flight attendant, causing second-degree burns.

- ✈ A passenger, angry about the lengthy delay, hurled a flight attendant into the lavatory door and attacked her until restrained. The battered flight attendant crawled to the cockpit for help.
- ✈ An intoxicated first-class passenger defecated on a meal cart during the flight.
- ✈ An intoxicated passenger ignored the flight attendant's warning not to smoke in the lavatory. Cursing and demanding more liquor, the passenger reportedly smashed a bottle of vodka over her head. The flight attendant was severely injured and required stitches.

Material on this page was compiled from several sources, including femininityinflight.com by Kathleen M. Barry and *Around the World in a Bad Mood* by Rene Foss.

# ODDBALL PAIRINGS

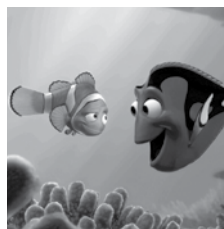
By Kellie Mecleary, Production Dramaturg

## Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson

The science behind this famous pair's chemistry is elusive. But the archetypal Victorian gentleman acts as an excellent foil to the brilliant, emotionally detached analytical machine—so excellent that they have reappeared in countless reiterations. These guys are an example of the male-buddy odd couple: different in every way, yet hopeless without one another. Many came before and since, but perhaps most is owed to the eccentric **Don Quixote** and the bumbling, faithful **Sancho Panza**—the original bromance.

**Other male odd couples:** Batman and Robin, Oscar and Felix, Ernie and Bert, the boys of *Men In Black*.

*Mud Blue Sky* is full of unlikely friendships, brought together by circumstance, both mundane and surprising. Though these unexpected pairings may seem unorthodox, such surprising bonds are seen again and again throughout history and culture. What is it that is so interesting about people from different worlds, viewpoints, or moments in time managing to connect, or at least coexist?



## Mark Twain and Helen Keller

Who would have guessed that storied American humorist Mark Twain and deaf-blind author and activist Helen Keller—what with their 45-year age difference, among other things—were besties? Twain wrote a letter to Keller in 1903, describing their relationship as “an affectionate friendship which has subsisted between us for nine years without a break, and without a single act of violence that I can call to mind. I suppose there is nothing like it in heaven; and not likely to be, until we get there and show off.”

**Other age-defying BFFs:** Boo Radley and Scout Finch, Michael Jackson and Elizabeth Taylor, Queen Elizabeth I and Lord Burghley.



## The Pixar Phenomenon

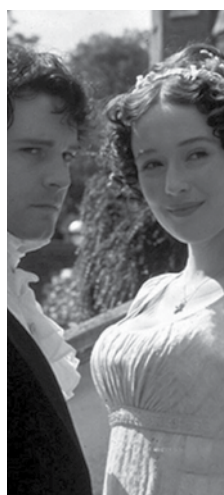
The wildly successful Pixar franchise loves unlikely friendships: their films are filled with 'em. There's the octogenarian Carl and the pre-pubescent Russell in *Up*, Remy the rat and Linguini the chef in *Ratatouille*, the timid Marlin and overeager Dory in *Finding Nemo*, and, most famous of all, the enemies-turned-lifelong friends Woody and Buzz in *Toy Story*. Perhaps Pixar has picked up on something in the zeitgeist? Perhaps they just wanted to differentiate themselves from their Disney princess-ridden predecessors. Either way, their success suggests that audiences still dig oddball pairs. We hope you dig ours.



## Elizabeth Bennett and Mr. Darcy

She is a free-spirited, run-through-the-rain, easy-to-laugh young lady, and he is an uptight, uber-wealthy stickler for decorum and status. Hate at first sight, love at last. One of the earliest versions of the opposites attract romantic comedy trope, Elizabeth Bennett and Mr. Darcy's slow dance towards respect and love in *Pride and Prejudice* celebrates the value of different but complimentary sensibilities. Countless rom-com storylines followed, and many more will come, but perhaps none so keenly observed and plotted as the hero and heroine of Jane Austen's beloved novel.

**Other opposites attracting:** Maria and Captain von Trap, Henry Higgins and Eliza Dolittle, Harry and Sally, Toni Morrison and Fran Lebowitz.



## Clarissa Dalloway and Sally Seton

These two from Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* couldn't be more different: Clarissa is light-haired, bird-like, the perfect hostess. Sally is dark, voluptuous, wild. And yet, Clarissa remembers her feeling for Sally “was not like one's feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown up.” A note: it is surprisingly difficult to find famous female pairs that fit this bill. Why might that be?

**Other unlikely lady buddies:** Julia Child and Simone Beck, *Downton Abbey's* Dowager Countess and Isabel Crowley, Hannah and Marney in *Girls*.

## Bill Clinton and George Bush, Sr.

Now that these former rivals are both out of the White House and the pesky politics are out of the way, they've formed a tight bond: Clinton even refers to Bush Sr. as a father figure. The two joined forces in 2004 to help raise money for Indian Ocean tsunami victims, and have shown up together at a variety of events over the years. According to Former First Lady Barbara Bush, Clinton is, “a good fellow,” and “very thoughtful about calling.”

**Other sworn enemies joining forces:** Romeo and Juliet, President Barak Obama and Hillary Clinton.



# MARISA EXPLAINS IT ALL

By Kellie Mecleary, Production Dramaturg

**ME:** So this is your first time doing like a Skype thing, a Skype-like thing?

**MARISA:** Yeah, the future.

**ME:** So, I guess, uh, just to give you a sense of, why I wanted to chat with you, with...what I'm...One of the components of the dramaturgy we do for the program, um, usually we write...a...bio of the playwright, so...and up until now, the playwrights I've written about have been dead, so I've just, you know—

**MARISA:** Sorry to make your job harder.

So began my Skype-like\* conversation with Marisa Wegrzyn, the living and breathing playwright of *Mud Blue Sky*. I won't make you endure the bulk of it—suffice it to say that I'm not quite up to Terry Gross' standards in my interviewing skills—but I did manage to learn some very interesting things about our up-and-coming author.

For one, Marisa's manner is direct and unadorned. When I asked her why she decided to pursue playwriting, she answered, "because I was good at it." She said this without a hint of ego: it was a fact, proven by a playwriting competition she entered (several times over) while a student at Washington University. The entire interview went like that: I would stumble through a rambling, slightly neurotic, overly articulated, East Coast question, and she would respond Midwestern style—simply and clearly, with a dash of wit.

Other things I learned: Marisa is Chicagoland born-and-bred. She's the second of three daughters: her parents are a retired anesthesiologist and a flight-attendant-turned-stay-at-home mom. She loves sci-fi, Martin McDonagh plays, and Tarantino films.

Some things I didn't learn from her, but found out elsewhere: at 31, Marisa has been produced at and/or commissioned by Steppenwolf, Yale Rep, and Actors Theatre of Louisville, among other places. In 2009, she received the prestigious Wasserstein Prize for her play *Hickorydickory*, which afforded her national attention, a \$25,000 prize, and a reading at New York's Second Stage.

Prior to playwriting, Wegrzyn wrote sketch comedy for her high school's yearly musical-comedy revue. It's through sketch comedy that Marisa became interested in theater. This makes more sense after having read some of Marisa's other plays: both *Killing Women* (2004) and *The Butcher of Baraboo* (2007) are filled with zany, splashy scenarios, where the payoff comes quickly, the laughs come easily, and macabre a-la McDonagh or Tarantino is a common element. The kind of stuff that, in milder form and smaller doses, would fit right in on *Saturday Night Live*.

I met Marisa after having read *Mud Blue Sky* and almost immediately thought, "that makes so much sense." Her personality and perspective seems to pervade the play, in style and tone. And yet, *Mud* is a departure from Wegrzyn's previous work. She told me, "I wanted to go in the opposite direction, see where I could go with being a little bit more gentle and a little bit more real." It therefore took her a while to complete. She wrote what is now the play's second scene—between Beth, a middle-aged flight attendant, and Jonathan, a high-school senior on prom night—very quickly, but then didn't know where to go from there. "I didn't really have the muscle to do the slow burn kind of plot development, where not much happens, but a lot happens too."

While attempting to be more real, and to focus on character over plot, Marisa chose to write about a group of women in a profession close to home. Like the women in *Mud*, Marisa's mother used to be a flight attendant. But Marisa is careful not to invest too much importance in that autobiographical connection. This is not a play about her mother, or mothers and daughters in any capacity. Her choice to write a play about flight attendants came out of a more indirect interest. "I was always interested in flight attendants in the way that, like—you know, if your parents have a certain job, you notice people who do that job?" Marisa paused, and then continued, "I guess that, I mean it seems like a hard life. Flight attendants. It's a hard life."

These days, Marisa is living in LA, trying her hand at TV writing, for the reason that many playwrights turn to TV—better pay. But, she has no intention of giving up writing plays. "I still like the craft of it. It's really hard to do it right, to do it well...with a play, I feel like there's always going to be that freedom of expression." This stumbling, rambling interviewer is sure glad to hear it.

\*At CENTERSTAGE we connect virtually using something called "FUZE meeting." All I know about it is that it is similar to, but more awesome than, Skype.