



Dear Readers,

In previous columns I have lamented (O.K. So I've complained. We all have!) about the trials and tribulations of traveling by air. The challenges of getting through the security line and subsequent strip routine with total strangers. This now seems to have become a totally natural bonding experience.

Admit it. Getting through airport security is *not* the most fun we've ever had. Some of the requirements appear to be ludicrous. But strip we must for a safer America.

Just weeks ago, my three-month-old granddaughter, little Miss Oakley Basche DeCristofaro, arrived for her first visit to Arizona with her mother (my darling daughter). Her first time on an airplane. (If you read my column regularly, brace yourself. You're destined to hear more about her over the coming years!)

Now we have a "little mother" with an infant traveling ALONE. And more importantly, she's *my* "little mother."

That means, "little mother traveling alone," you need to manage to take off your shoes, load them onto the conveyor belt along with your

carry on luggage, diapers, formula/breast milk, toys, jacket, one-quart bag with toiletries, laptop computer and anything metal while baby is strapped comfortably to your chest.

Now, take off that baby!

The TSA website states, "NEVER leave babies in an infant carrier while it goes through the X-ray machine." DUH! It further states, "All child-related equipment that will fit through the X-ray machine must go through the X-ray machine. Examples include...baby slings...."

Take her OUT of the sling, place IT (the sling – *not* the baby) on the carrier and carry the little tyke through the metal detector.

Having gone through the metal detector – ideally unscathed – little mama, figure out how to redress with the sling while holding your baby, place baby in the sling, claim your luggage, diapers, formula/breast milk, toys, jacket, one-quart bag, laptop computer and anything metal. Oh, and put your shoes back on.

And be quick about it!

They passed through security at JFK. It was a light flight and they had the entire row to themselves. Oak could nap on a seat. Better than holding her on your lap for five hours.

In the overall scheme of things, it went quite well. Oakley is accustomed to the hectic world of Manhattan and has already dined in some of the finest places. She is well behaved and an "easy" baby. Like any baby is *easy!*

The only time Oakley broadcasts any dissatisfaction is when she's hungry. This is most of the time. I swear she is either eating or *dreaming* about

eating. In her sleep her little rosebud of a mouth and tongue constantly make teeny sucking movements! She's long and lean with great little bands of baby-fat rolls constructing her arms, legs and multiple chins. The pediatrician tells us that this little lady is the size of a six-month-old. She is a World Class Eater, our mighty Oak.

No sooner than the plane pulls away from the gate – you *know* what comes next!

Why is it that babies never poop on schedule? Is that a skill developed in adulthood?

Court has become quite adept at changing diapers in tight places. You haven't lived until you've changed a poop diaper in an airplane bathroom. I suspect it's not on your "Things I Want to Do Before I Die" list either.

Several hours later they arrived at Sky Harbor. Happy and smiling.

We wanted our time together to be uninterrupted family time. Time to cuddle and nurture. Time for Glammie and Poppy to bond with our little miss. So rather than inviting friends to stop by at their convenience – we decided to entertain them at an afternoon open house. We threw a "Coming Out" Party for the Oakster – as she was "Coming Out" to AZ! It was a stellar idea – both in theory and in practice! O.K. We were exhausted from the preparation and clean up. And, yes, it cut into our cuddle and nurture time. Nonetheless, it was great! She charmed them all. Like there was *ever* a question!

We had our visit and our party. And our time together wonderful beyond description.

Five days passed and LH and I joined our "babies"

in the snakelike security line at Sky Harbor for their return flight. We planned to help until arriving at the first point of inspection – the I.D./boarding card inspection – after which we knew we'd have to wish them a bon voyage. The line was endless. This will take 45 minutes at best. I had already started to cry.

Momentarily, we are summoned by Barbara, a uniformed TSA agent. She opens the rope and directs us to pass. LH resists. "We're not going with them. They're traveling alone."

"I'm trying to help you and you're giving me a hard time? Move on up to the front of the line!"

Yes, ma'am! Barbara is my hero!

We're at the "I.D./boarding pass" security check point. "We're not going with them. They're traveling alone."

Agent Mike instructs us, "Listen. Go back to the check-in counter and ask for escort passes. You'll be able to go to the gate with them and be together until they board." He hands us a card. "And here's a pass so you can come back in through the employee line and you won't have to wait." Mike is my *new* hero.

So I'm fickle. Am I also dreaming?

We get the escort passes. Go back through the employee line. Pass through the security screening as would regular passengers and proceed to the gate. Even with all of this, we're early.

Court approaches the gate agent. Babe in arms. "Is the flight full? Is there any chance to change my seat to have an empty one next to me?" He says no without making eye contact or skipping a beat.

Before I had the opportunity to tell him what I thought of his attitude, the woman agent next to him says, "Let me check." She checks the computer (clever girl!) – pages a passenger who was assigned a seat towards the back of the plane next to an empty one. Would he be willing to trade with Court who has a seat in the front? With not a moment's hesitation, he says, "Sure!" The gate agent is a mother of six. She understands. She is my *newest* hero.

They boarded. I cried. The flight took off. I cried.

Oak's a World Class Eater. I'm a World Class Crier.

LH just returned from his most recent business trip east. Encountered Mike checking I.D. and boarding passes. Thanked him again. Mike asked if LH had been east to visit his granddaughter. Hectic and busy – Mike took the time to remember and care. Wow!

I officially take back all of the awful things I've said in the past about the entire security process, airport frustrations, gate agents, challenges of traveling, yada, yada, yada.

I will never again encounter a "little mother" traveling alone with her baby and not offer to help.

Wishing you a blessed New Year. May all of your hopes and dreams come true, your lives be brighter than ever before and may others offer you whatever help *you* need in the coming year and beyond.

Warmest Regards.

Hope H. Ozer
Publisher