

Speaking on a Shoestring

Many speakers can relate to accepting a low-paying engagement at some point during their career. Mine was for an impoverished client that required me to travel from Berkeley, Ca., to Yuma, Ariz.

Unable to drive 13 hours each way, I figured I'd find a discount flight, discount ground transportation and scrimp where I could to help my client stay within budget.

Airport parking was out of the question. A week's parking could feed a family of four for a month. But airport shuttles are pricey, too.

Luckily, I found Semi-Super-Shuttle! Half the price, half the van. The shuttle pulled up, and the side door magically opened. As I boarded, the driver pointed to a sign: All passengers pay in advance. So, I paid the driver, he slammed the door shut and off we went.

The driver sat me in the wheel well. Some drivers spare the air—this driver spares the spare! As the driver sped around the corner, the sliding door flew open. It was no wonder he demanded payment in advance. Suddenly, the term “easy drop-off” took on new meaning.

After a harrowing ride to the airport, I was relieved to fly a puddle jumper to my destination. My air carrier was Fly-By-Night Airline, which needed the daylight hours to solar charge the propellers. If Southwest is a discount airline, Fly-By-Night is a deep discount airline. Critics call it SouthLess Airlines. They also dispense peanuts, but you have to shell your own.



To its credit, SouthLess was very efficient. Everyone multitasks. The man who checked me in also carried my bags to the plane ... on his way to the cockpit.

I don't want to say it was a working-class airline, but when I inquired about the in-flight entertainment, they asked me what I could do. After two sets, I finally returned to my seat and they let me keep the boa.

On the ground in Yuma, the client had promised ground transportation to the hotel. Imagine my surprise when I was met curbside by a sign with my name on it ... hanging from the neck of a burro. To say I felt like a donkey is an understatement. A short gallop later, we trotted into the hotel's parking lot.

There are hotels, motels, no-tells and fleabags. My suspicions about my accommodations were aroused upon check-in when I noticed a lobby sign listing weekly, daily and hourly rates. My fears were confirmed upon passing vending machines in the lobby dispensing bed bug spray. The hotel also boasted free movies. Later, I realized I was to

be the featured entertainment when I noticed a webcam mounted on my TV.

No wakeup call was needed. The sirens of the police paddy-wagon did the trick at 3 a.m. I usually seek a late checkout, but not this time. My program the next day went well, and the planner drove me to the airport by tractor. Fly-By-Night welcomed me like a returning astronaut, if only for two more sets on the return flight.

Speakers constantly tell me “travel ain't what it used to be.” I always reply, “Thank goodness!”



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