

Ode to the "Queen of the Skies"

What great memories, flying high, the grandest airplane in the skies.
The chance of a lifetime, for America West Airlines.
August '90 to New Year's '92.

Every flight. A surge of adrenaline.
The rush of takeoff.
What a thrill.

In my jumpseat, facing aft, I look out the window at the right wing of the aircraft.
Bending. Flexing.
I'm wondering. No, hoping.
Is this plane going to get off the ground?
Somebody said the runway in Phoenix was just long enough for the 747 to take off.
Just long enough.

Morning departure to Honolulu.
Time to wine and dine the first-class guests.
Russian caviar. Vodka. Nestled in a bowl of ice.
Dry ice misting over the service cart and spilling onto the floor.
A feast for the eyes.
So are the famous faces. Time for a little PR.
Chateaubriand anyone?

Descending into Honolulu.
Excitement is in the air.
Flight Engineer Edwin Korzinsky gives his usual spiel.
Ladies and gentlemen. Gaze out the window at the billowy white clouds. We'll
soon be landing in paradise...

Dear passenger, you're on vacation.
Cabin and flight crew.
Let's take a break, too.

Twenty-four hours. Time's up.

Time to prep for the all-nighter back to Phoenix.
Curbside drop-off at Honolulu International.

Out of nowhere it hits me. Like an ocean wave churning the senses.
The sweet scent of plumeria flowers waft through the open-air concourse,
Lingering onboard the plane.
A token memory to take home from the tropics.

Pre-flight briefing from the Flight Service Manager. Yours truly.
Emergency equipment.
Order of service.
Meals catered.
Pax count.
Big smiles everyone!

Here they come, all sunburned and sated, from a mai tai week, away from work.
Ready for departure.
Doors armed and cross-checked.

The big whale lumbers down the runway.
Picking up speed.
Faster. Faster.
It's V1, folks.
Can't abort now.
No problem. Not on this runway.
The asphalt stretches for miles.

It's dark outside.
I can't see the wing from my jumpseat.
But the dips in the runway tell me what's going on.
Bending. Flexing.
Last item on my takeoff checklist.
Dear Lord. Give us a safe flight home.

The crack of dawn.
I squint through the cockpit window.
A ribbon of land glows purple pink.
The California coastline at 5 am.
My, what a beautiful sight.

Another forty minutes, and then ga-thunk.

Touchdown.

As we turn onto the taxiway, I stare at the ground under the wing.
No more runway.

Gotta wait for a gate.
Hey, ground crew. Is anyone awake yet?
We've been flying all night.
Seatbelt sign off.
Engines spooling down.
Thanks for flying with us.
Three-hundred-ninety-six times.

Last leg of my trip. Hop into the T-Bird.
Superstition Freeway, heading east.
Right into the blinding sun.
I need a pair of toothpicks for my eyelids.
Stay awake, kiddo.
Almost home.

A parting memory.
It's fitting.
My all-nighter out of Nagoya, Japan.
Amerika Westo Kohku. Phonetically speaking, that is.
I check my watch.
It's 5 pm.
Time for pushback. No delays.
A little chatter with the CSR's in the first-class galley.
All stocked up and ready to go.

Next thing I know we're on our knees,
Our faces glued to the porthole windows.
Staring in awe at the sight on the tarmac.
The Japanese ground crew and maintenance techs.
Seven or eight of them.
Standing in a row, as our 747 pushes back.
They're saluting us.

We wave back.

Goodbye.

I'll never forget their show of respect.
Just standard procedure.
Or the culture of an island nation.
Or maybe pride for a job well done.

And a job well done for the "Queen of the Skies."
What a workhorse you've been around the globe.
The greatest gift to aviation.
Much gratitude, Boeing engineers.
Your skill and precision.
The finest.

Flying.
At its best.



Aircraft #N532AW – Phoenix Sky Harbor Intl. Airport



One of the best cabin crews I ever worked with!