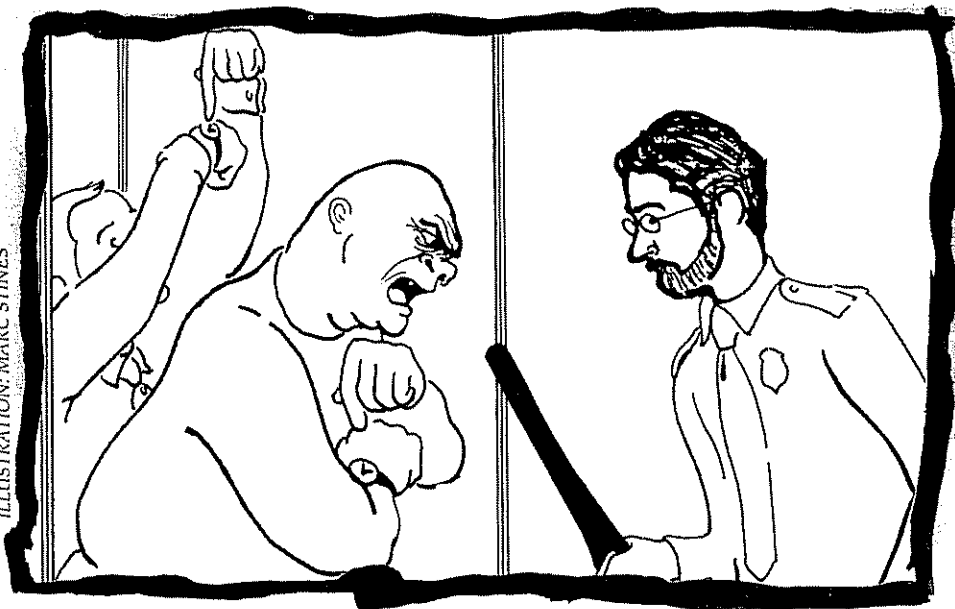


ILLUSTRATION: MARC STINES



By Claire Zulkey

SO WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU DO, MARC STINES?

They usually end up an inch away from getting the cops called because of the stupid shit they do. One 80-year-old lady packed a gun in her purse to shoot terrorists on the flight.

I conduct a lot of interviews, and when I got a friendly email to do one on people with interesting-yet-everyday jobs for this publication, I said, "Sure! No problem!" Then I promptly pushed the deadline back several weeks because what turned out to be "no problem" involved a deacon at my local church who for some reason had a problem with talking with me about what it takes to ring the church bells. Bastard. Oops! Sorry, God

Fortunately, I had a backup plan. A fellow I know made the quite natural transition from working at a multi-story Banana Republic on the glittering Magnificent Mile here in Chicago to handling security duties at O'Hare International Airport. When I found this out, I was full of questions. Fortunately, I got these down on paper

Claire Zulkey: How did you end up working security at the airport?

Marc Stines: A friend worked for the HR company doing the hiring for the security firm. I got the scoop and went for it. The real story is the hiring process, nearly two full days of mental and physical assessments. But the real trial was the paperwork. I had to recall everything I had done for the past seven years. I can tell you that right offhand I couldn't recall shit, and certainly not my parents' social security numbers.

CZ: What else can you tell me about the hiring process?

MS: Well, it was about two full days of training, with 16 hours of paperwork. Then there were physical exams, and I had to give a urine sample

for drug testing. Also, they tested your proficiency in English on the computer.

CZ: How hard was it?

MS: So easy. Just testing fill in the sentence and present and past tense and stuff. Some people didn't do so well, though.

CZ: Do you work for one airline or do you get shifted around?

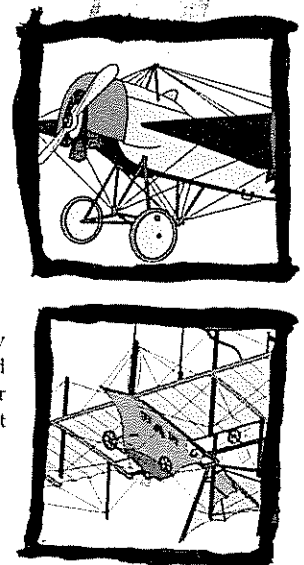
MS: I get shifted around. There are shift bids, and what you get depends on seniority. Right now I'm at a pretty sweet spot, and I handle a lot of first-class and business-class fliers. They're friendly, they know what they're doing. Once I had to work a checkpoint that had six lanes. We were handling more than half of the planes' load with a third of the workforce.

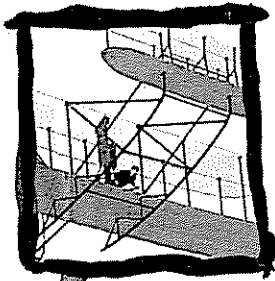
CZ: Do you think you would have considered the job if that position hadn't gained so much attention in the last few years?

MS: I actually hadn't heard about the TSA before I applied. I live under a stone in a cave, current events-wise. I had always wanted to run the X-ray when at the airport. I never would have thought of actually trying for that job. Even as a kid it is easy to spot the jobs that suck.

CZ: What are your coworkers like, are they similar age/positions as you?

MS: I work with every kind of





But some people just don't give a fuck. One woman asked for a female screener and then yelled, "Don't look at my vibrator!"

person imaginable Old men and women. Kids just out of high school I work with people of all ages, races and genders (if you include hermaphrodites as a gender) All these people are fuckin' crazy in one way or another

CZ: What have been some of the more unusual things you've seen on the job?

MS: The most unusual things are actually very common. It is just creepy to put the face to the sex toy. And that is what everyone wants to know if we have seen. We see a lot of porn and sex toys. Valentine's Day has the highest concentration of dildos. I saw a woman's bag on the X-ray with only a change of clothes, a bottle of wine and a dildo that looked like a deer antler. The other unusual stuff breaks down to how stupid the passengers suddenly become once they set foot on airport property. Suddenly they lose the ability to read signs right in front of their faces, literally in front of their faces. I see people move the sign out of their way to get through the line, then claim to not have seen it when we ask them why they didn't remove the laptop from the bag.

CZ: How do you handle it when you find a vibrator?

MS: Just common sense, don't wave it around, take it to a private screening area. But some people just don't give a fuck. One woman asked for a female screener and then yelled, "Don't look at my vibrator!"

CZ: Do you ever see people who seem really sad, or upset to be flying?

MS: Yes, and they are a pain in the ass to deal with. They are paralyzed with anxiety. They can't read signs or respond to verbal commands. They usually end up an inch away from getting the cops called because of the stupid shit they do. One 80-year-old lady packed a gun in her purse to shoot terrorists on the flight.

CZ: Have you heard any bomb jokes?

MS: No bomb jokes are allowed. If we hear the words "I have bomb" in any order in the same sentence you won't be flying that day. It is not a joke to us. Chances are if a bomb were found at the check-point, guess where it would be detonated.

CZ: How seriously do you take the job? I mean, do your supervisors tell you things like "people's lives are in your hands," etc.?

MS: Based on the last answer, we take it pretty seriously. Lives are in our hands. If the security on September 11th didn't let the box cutters [on board] the incident would not have occurred. Given that, I wonder why so many people still pack box cutters.

CZ: Why do people have to take their laptops out of their bags?

MS: Because we said so. Just take it out of the fuckin' bag and stop making it so hard for everyone. So we can get a clear image on the X-ray. Given that information, can you imagine why people still go ahead and put the bag back on top of the computer?

CZ: Where would you be working if the economy

was great and you could be anywhere you wanted?

MS: I don't know. I don't like jobs. I would like to be my own boss.

CZ: How long do you think you'll stay in airport security?

MS: I have no idea. I thought that I'd be out of here by now.

CZ: Do you like your job?

MS: Sometimes. Like right now, things are slow and it's pretty easy.

CZ: Do you wear a uniform?

MS: Dark blue pants, black socks, black shoes, a white shirt with patches on it and a clip-on tie.

CZ: Why a clip-on?

MS: Security reasons, in case somebody decides to choke you and pull at your tie. Policemen wear them for the same reason.

CZ: What are some of the dumbest questions people have asked you after you told them you worked airport security?

MS: What are some of the most unusual things you've seen on the job? I'm kidding. That is the most common question. People want to know other people's dirty secrets or want to know if we are really safer with the TSA. "Are y'all catching terrorists?" No, I can't say I've caught a terrorist. I doubt any will be bothering us for a long time. I do, however, stop a lot of garden-variety wackos and possible murderers from bringing weapons on the plane. I'm more afraid of pissed-off, recently laid-off airline workers killing people than any Arab. Remember the term "going postal"?

CZ: Have you ever hit on anyone going through security?

MS: I've flirted a little bit but I need to keep that to a minimum to keep it professional.

CZ: Have you dealt with air-ragging flyers?

MS: Sometimes.

There are times when you have to pat people down if there's metal on them, like if somebody's wearing jeans, on the rivets or the belt buckles. So I'll ask these guys to open their belt so I can check it and behind it, and they yell, "This is bullshit!" and then whip open the belt so hard that it practically hits you in the face. It's like they think they're Indiana Jones.

