



Airborne

TO THE EDITOR:

Leslie Bennetts's scathing review of Ann Hood's new memoir, "Fly Girl" (May 15), seems to boil down to resentment that Hood actually enjoyed working as a flight attendant.

Hood's experiences might not always echo Nell McShane Wulfhart's "The Great Stewardess Rebellion," but why should they?

Hood's book is not a history, although it contains plenty of context. It is a personal account of her experiences. And contrary to Bennetts's review, Hood deals squarely with all the negatives of the profession — the sexist weight checks, the in-flight emergencies, the jet-lagged layovers.

But this is also a coming-of-age story, and being a flight attendant gave the younger Hood professional skills, insight into people and a ticket to see the world.

In dismissing Hood as a Doris Day of the skies, Bennetts has fallen victim to the very sexism she derides. The author, and the readers who would enjoy this book, deserve better.

BETTY J. COTTER
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TO THE EDITOR:

Leslie Bennetts's diatribe on the abuse and misogyny endured by flight attendants left her little room to acknowledge that these individuals are well trained in recognizing health and safety issues.

Indeed, flight attendants were the first to speak out about protecting passengers — and themselves — from the risk of lung disease, allergies, heart problems and fires due to smoking in aircraft cabins. Beginning in the late 1960s, the flight attendant Patty Young and several of her colleagues at other airlines lobbied Congress to end smoking aloft. Although opposed by most of their employers and, of course, the tobacco industry, a federal smoking ban on domestic flights of less than two hours went into effect in 1988 and was extended to all flights in 1990. The popularity of this measure intensified the focus on smoking as an occupational health hazard and a danger for children and other non-smokers.

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The writer is director of the Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society at the University of Alabama School of Medicine.

TO THE EDITOR:

In her review of "Fly Girl," Leslie Bennetts uses the Doris Day movies of the mid-20th century to illustrate pejoratively how the views and roles of women have altered for the better. This point is undoubtedly true, but to use Doris Day movies as an example of a benighted time doesn't track. During an era in which she was one of the biggest stars at the box office, Day regularly played career women who achieved their success because of their initiative, work ethic and intelligence. The men in her movies may have made fun of her ostensible chastity, but her characters were not prudish so much as selective. Bennetts should read the film critic Molly Haskell's monograph on Day and other onscreen women to have her thinking challenged.

JOHN L. JONES
NEW YORK

Danish Noir

TO THE EDITOR:

Fernanda Eberstadt's piece about two of Tove Ditlevsen's works (May 15) struck a deep note with me. I have read "The Trouble With Happiness," and after poring through Eberstadt's review of it and of "The Faces," I dare say that I understand a lot better what motivated Tove Ditlevsen to go in the opposite direction of *hygge*. Her life alone could be the stuff of noir novels and it is not surprising that she echoed it in her prose.

Although her stories are set in the mid-20th century, there's so much that hasn't changed. The narratives are dark and dispiriting; they offer no relief and no way out. Even in a story like "Umbrella," where Eberstadt sees dreams that must be fought for, the fact is that its protagonist remains at the mercy of her husband's violent mood swings, and that her dream of a silky new umbrella may not come to pass. Ditlevsen's stories cast a dark spell, yet they are a gem to read and to behold.

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