

How the U.S. Airlines became smoke free

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EDITOR, -- The letter from Henningfield and Rose (Tobacco Control 10:295-296), provides valuable historic information about US Federal Aviation Administration Policy to prohibit smoking in both the passenger section and the flight deck of scheduled passenger flights. They tell of the smoking ban passed by Congress in 1989. Yes, their letter offers lessons about political and bureaucratic achievements. But they told only one part of the story. The influence of anti-tobacco activists, especially Betty Carnes, is of even greater interest and should not be forgotten. Single handedly, Betty obtained the first non-smoking flight on a scheduled airline, American Airlines, on one flight, New York to Phoenix, on 8 August 1971.

On August 8, 1971, American Airlines provided three rows of non-smoking seats on their long flight between New York and Phoenix, Arizona. It was an idea whose time had come. The news of it spread like wildfire. Passengers responded with enthusiasm and commendation. American Airlines realized it was onto something popular and soon extended non-smoking seats to other flights. Its competitors were forced to do the same. Gradually, the non-smoking rows increased from three to six to a dozen rows and, within a few years, over half of the rows were non-smoking throughout North America, and later around the world. Gradually, all scheduled flights, worldwide, became smoke-free. The airlines saved money in all sorts of ways. Cleaning costs went way down. Their flight attendants were no longer subjected to occupational smoke. Tar deposits, which had spewed out of air-conditioning systems and could add up to 45 kilograms in a year when smokers were on board, ceased to be a non-remunerative payload. Who achieved this breakthrough, this public health and preventive medicine achievement, which has spread to many other venues throughout society and must have saved lives that otherwise might have been lost to second-hand smoke? It was Betty Carnes, of Scottsdale, Arizona. In 1971, Carnes was travelling on an American Airlines plane between Houston and Phoenix when the air-conditioning and filter system stopped working. This did not stop Betty's chain-smoking seatmate. He refused to extinguish his cigarette. It was terribly embarrassing to grab an air bag and be sick in front of all those people, recalled Carnes so Betty arranged with Paul Willmore, the American Airlines sales manager in Phoenix to provide three rows of non-smoking seats one of their long flights. But her efforts were not restricted to air travel. She also invented a "*Thank You for Not Smoking*" sign. In 1973, she succeeded in persuading the Arizona legislature to become the first state to prohibit smoking in public places, such as elevators, libraries, art museums, indoor theatres,

concert halls and public transit systems. By 1983, the Arizona law had been the model for similar legislation in 32 other states.

At the First World Conference on Nonsmokers' Rights, held in Washington, DC in 1985, Carnes was recognized (*along with the late Dr. Luther L. Terry, who presented the first Surgeon General's Report on Smoking in 1964*) as one of the two pioneers of the non-smoker's rights movement. Carnes died at Scottsdale on October 15, 1987, but her achievements deserve to be remembered.

Stuart Houston also said "*This 30th anniversary is of special significance to me, because Betty was a fellow bird bander and a long-time correspondent and special friend. She was the first woman to become an elected member of the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) in 1955. She banded 10,000 birds and attended more consecutive meetings (39 of the AOU) than anyone else*"

From the Chicago Tribune after her death....

Betty Carnes Led Anti-Smoking Fight

October 18, 1987|By United Press International.

SCOTTSDALE, ARIZ. — Betty Carnes, who helped push through the nation`s first state law prohibiting smoking in public places and is credited with creating the sign "Thank You for Not Smoking", has died at 82. Mrs. Carnes, also a world-recognized expert on birds, died Thursday at Scottsdale Memorial Hospital. Her death was announced Friday.