



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Also included are airline uniforms, promotional materials, and objects related to passenger amenities and meal service. The aviation toys and games in the collection reflect the allure of flight through the ages.”

-From “Exploring the Wonder of Flight,” San Francisco Airport Commission Aviation Library and Louis A. Turpen Aviation Museum

After about two years of meaning to visit the Aviation Library and Aviation Museum at the San Francisco Airport, I finally got there recently. It turned out to be a totally free trip, since not only is the museum free, but also – because of “Save the Air” – so was BART. Now that is a deal.

The librarian there, Julie Tashima, graciously offered to show me some of the museum items, as well as the books. This turned out to be a wonderful experience, since we then spent about half an hour looking at all sorts of memorabilia related to commercial airlines.

We started by looking at a row of tiny gold and purple airplanes, replicas of Lindbergh’s airplane. This reminded me of some old movie footage my father recently had converted to DVDs. My grandparents were in Paris when Lindbergh landed and my grandfather filmed him flying over Paris. In the film, the airplane is far away but still visible as it circles

around on the day after that historic flight.

My favorite part of the collection was the children’s games and toys. With names like “Air Mail Pilot” and “Airplane Speedway,” the games were fascinating examples of airlines marketing to children. The toys included a “main street airport,” which is similar to the Fisher-Price parking garage my children played with. As I walked up and down and looked at these toys, I remembered the set of soft sticky plastic shapes I was given on an airplane trip when I was a child. The brightly colored geometric pieces could be moved around a shiny black board, to create various designs. I loved that toy.

Besides the toys, there are swizzle sticks, air sick bags, airplane safety cards, napkins, dishes, luggage tags, amenity kits, blankets, posters, flight bags and much more. I learned that flight bags were created by airlines because air travel was

the first time travelers were separated from their personal belongings and there had to be some way they could keep personal items with them.

Only a fraction of the museum’s archives are in the locked and windowed cupboards I saw, and it is incredible to imagine all the items that have been either donated or purchased. According to Ms. Tashima, the goal of the museum is to collect items from every airline that has ever flown out of San Francisco.

We also looked at the current book displays and some of the books in the collection. The library holds more than 7000 volumes, including the periodicals. Some of the books are part of a special collection, which is in a humidity-controlled room, while others are simply in locked glass cabinets. Since it is a public library, anybody can come in and – by simply filing out a browsing slip – have a book paged and then sit

down and look through it. Books include fiction and non-fiction and the special collection has books that are signed or rare.

There is a lot more to this museum and library. There are ongoing displays, which are rotated every few months. There are beautiful replicas of airplanes, framed black-and-white photographs, and even a huge propeller from the China Clipper. The museum itself is designed after the original 1930’s terminal, and the shiny patterned marble floor and arched high ceiling make it a pleasure to visit. In case you decide to do that, it is located in the international terminal at SFO and it is open every day except Saturdays.