

Cosell Wasn't A Fan Of Jamestown Trips

Controversial Broadcaster Used Portion Of Book To Detail Travel Adventures

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by Frank Hyde

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following article — a review by former Post-Journal sports editor Frank Hyde — appeared in this newspaper sometime after legendary broadcaster Howard Cosell published a book in 1974 entitled "Like It Is" (Simon & Schuster).

Take it from Howard Cosell, the controversial TV sports commentator, visiting Jamestown, especially in the winter, can become a precarious adventure. Cosell emceed the Men's Club of Temple Hessed Abraham Sports Dinner here three times. His travel trials, on at least one occasion, are mentioned prominently in his latest book, "Like It Is." Cosell also gives prominent mention to Si Goldman, president of radio station WJTN, who served as talent chairman for the dinner during the last several years.

Here is how Cosell leads into the Jamestown incident after describing his dislike for almost continual air travel in order to meet his heavy schedule:

"One instance occurred in Jamestown, N.Y., in January 1961. Jamestown is a pleasant little furniture-manufacturing town in the northwestern part of New York State, about 60 miles south of Buffalo. It is in a valley, and by November clouds slip in and hover unceasingly, or so it seems, until April. During that time, it does nothing but snow.

"There is a little fellow in Jamestown named Si Goldman who owns a radio station that is affiliated with ABC Radio. He puts together a sports banquet every year that attracts the outstanding stars in the world of sports. He does it on sheer hustle and indefatigable effort. I have always been astonished to see the Jim Browns and John Unitases of the world land via Allegheny (otherwise known as Agony) Airlines, in blizzard-like conditions, relieved to be alive and to be, greeted by Si.

"In the late 1950s Si hooked me. In fact, he got me three years in a row. And every time I went to Jamestown it was an adventure. Once I flew Allegheny with Kyle Rote and Jimmy Piersall. We stopped at Scranton-Wilkes Barre and we stopped at Olean. It was snowing, of course. The winds were violent, the visibility was poor. With each landing we prayed. Finally, we got to Jamestown. As we got off the plane, Piersall, who once had a mental breakdown, muttered, 'They were right all along. I'm crazy. I've got to be to go through this just to be at a banquet.'

"But the biggest trouble with going to Jamestown was that you never knew whether or not you could get out the next day. The odds were that you couldn't because of the weather. This was why, in January 1961, I seized upon the opportunity to fly a private plane back to New York immediately after the banquet.

"I was the emcee that year, and among the guests who had come up from New York were Roger Maris, the American League's most valuable player; Andy Robustelli, defensive captain of the New York Giants; Bill Fugazy, promoter of the then upcoming third Patterson-Johanson fight, and Dick Young,

sports columnist for The New York Daily News. Fugazy had his own plane and flew up in it. He offered me a lift back and said he was landing at Westchester County Airport, only 20 minutes from my home. I accepted immediately. Maris overheard the conversation and asked to be included. He was to be honored the next day at a luncheon in New York. Fugazy was delighted to accommodate him. Dick Young wanted to go, too. Fugazy said he had room.

“This left only Robustelli to be accounted for. Andy is deeply religious and a deeply devoted family man. He’s got nine kids and lots of superstitions, including a fear of private planes. But he didn’t want to be left behind.

“So, he became the final member of our traveling troupe. We all got into a limousine — Andy growling that he hadn’t called his wife, Jeanie — and set off for the airport. The weather was horrible, nothing but snow and the roads were icy. Suddenly about halfway to the airport, we smelled smoke. ‘The car’s on fire,’ Maris said. ‘Stop the car.’ We all jumped out and, sure enough when we lifted up the car seat, there was a lighted cigarette that someone had carelessly allowed to slip under the seat. We extinguished the cigarette, made sure the upholstery was no longer burning and started to climb back into the car.

“But not Robustelli. To him the incident was a warning: Don’t fly in that plane. But we couldn’t leave him there on the road, and we didn’t want to go back to the hotel. So Andy agreed to go on to the airport with us. Then he could be driven back to the hotel. We got to the airport and Robustelli, still grouching, decided he would take the ultimate risk. He would board with us. Maris, impervious to fear, sat up front next to the pilot. ‘I want to see how this thing operates,’ he explained. ‘If something happens to the pilot, I’ll bring the damned thing down.’

“The plane was freezing. The heater wasn’t working. And then the pilot quietly acquainted us with two problems: There was ice on the wings, and we were overweight by about 250 pounds. ‘That does it for me,’ Robustelli said. “Let me off and you’ll be down ‘to weight.’ By now the limousine had gone, the airport was deserted and there was no way Andy could go back to the hotel. The pilot assured Andy that the excess weight was not that much of a problem, and he also said that in a matter of moments he could get the ice off the wings. Andy had no choice but to stay. Nor did the rest of us. In about 20 minutes the pilot taxied to the runway and off we went. Never in my life have I been so cold. The only thing that made the situation bearable for me was that for the first and only time in my life, I saw that Robustelli was cold, too. Andy has always been one of those rugged ones, proud of his physique, and determined to show that he is not vulnerable, like mortal men, to illness, cold or any of the ordinary vicissitudes of life that beset most of us. He would rarely, if ever, wear an overcoat in the winter, and he has never had any hesitancy in crowing about his superior body. But now he was reduced to a shivering shell. With the four of us huddling together and Maris up front next to the pilot, we had a calm, uneventful flight to Westchester County. All the worry was for naught.

“Fugazy, who is also in the limousine-service business, had a car waiting for Andy and me. The others were going on to New York, but Andy lives in Stamford, Conn., not far from my home.

“It was now about 2:30 in the morning. We left the airport, got to the Merritt Parkway and the car broke down. This was the last straw. The whole thing had become absurd. Somehow, the driver limped into a service station (the car needed only minor surgery), and at 3:15 I was banging on the front door, waking up my family, and trying to explain to my wife why I was home and what we had gone through.

“‘I told you not to go to Jamestown,’” she said.

“I have never gone again.”