

## ***BEHIND THE CURTAIN: INFLIGHT CREWMEMBERS DESCRIBE THEIR PANDEMIC EXPERIENCES***

### **The flight was eerily quiet.**

The JetBlue aircraft was capable of carrying 162 passengers. Tena Melcher and her fellow Inflight Crewmembers, however, had just 15 people on board. Nearly all of them were Los Angeles EMTs en route to the pandemic's epicenter: New York City.

"It was very quiet," Melcher said. "Most of them were staying to themselves. It was real solemn. It was a weird feeling, almost like walking through a ghost town."

To Melcher, it appeared the paramedics heading into the danger zone were trying to "wrap their heads" around the enormity of the crisis and risk they were taking.

"It was if they were mentally preparing themselves for what they might encounter," Melcher, who is chair of the TWU Scheduling Committee at JetBlue, said.

During her nearly 21-year career as an IFC, Melcher had encountered other large groups flying together: businesspeople heading to conventions; police officers going to the funeral of a slain cop in another city; firefighters coming to New York to assist in the 9/11 rescue and recovery efforts.

This was different. The Emergency Medical Technicians pretty much were the only passengers on the plane.

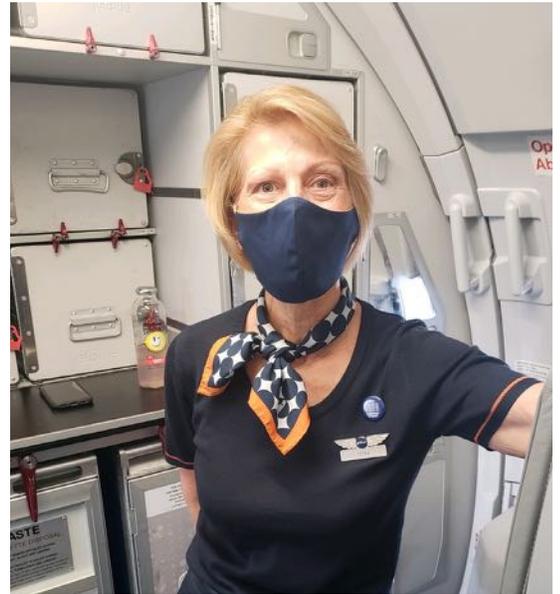
"We didn't know what to do," Melcher said. "We're used to taking care of 162 passengers."

The IFCs on board tried to answer the paramedics' occasional questions: What was open in NYC? Where could they eat when the flight landed? The reality was there weren't many options. The city was in near-total lockdown. Even the restaurants in the airport were closed.

Melcher only made five trips combined in April and May. One flight had just three passengers. Things began picking up in June. Through June 19th, she worked seven coast-to-coast flights with loads ranging from 50 to 90 people.

The types of travelers have been varied: medical professionals heading home; family members going to see other family members they haven't seen for some time; frequent business flyers who have customers or partners on either coast. The best part of the uptick in passengers flying is seeing more children on board, Melcher said.

"They have this innocence about them," Melcher said. "You see them excited about boarding the airplane and flying. You hear the laughter and the chatter. A child gives you hope that things are getting better."



*IFC Tena Melcher (photo above) welcomes seeing more kids on board.*

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