

A PILOT TOOK A STAND

On Aug. 1, 1970, W. Lain Guthrie, a commercial airline pilot, decided he had had enough. He had dumped his last load of kerosene into the environment.

Holcomb Noble wrote in the *New York Times* that at that time the airline industry practice was to dump waste kerosene during takeoff or at high altitudes. Airline officials claimed that the kerosene evaporated and caused no harm to the environment, but Guthrie did not buy it. He insisted that in peak seasons as much as 500 gallons of fuel was dumped every day over his home airport of Miami. The fuel made the runways greasy, increasing the risks that pilots faced when applying the brakes on landing, and contributed to the smog and poor visibility that they regarded as the most common hazard they faced.



And so, on his 30th anniversary as a pilot, Guthrie celebrated by following his conscience. He refused to take off until the waste fuel accumulated from the previous flight was pumped out of his jet. In subsequent flights, he continued his demand, and two months later, he was fired for insubordination, with officials saying he had caused frequent and long delays.

By now, however, he had become a cause célèbre, as other pilots rallied around him and also refused to dump fuel. Finally, the airline backed down and rehired Guthrie at full pay. Soon, the airline industry as a whole ceased the practice of aerial fuel dumping. Captain Guthrie retired shortly after he was reinstated. He died in 1997 of a heart attack at his home in Miami at the age of 84.

For wrongs to be righted, the question often is who will lead the way and be the first to pay the price of following his or her conscience. For some people, it means deciding that they have told their last lie, or cut their last corner.

When we follow our conscience, as Captain Guthrie did, it just may be that many other people will be encouraged to follow theirs.

But even if others do not, the day we choose to do what we think is right is a cause for personal satisfaction and for celebration.

– Beecher Hunter