

The Day They Confiscated My Smucker's Cherry Preserves

By Art Stevens

Who ever thought that my small jar of Smucker's Cherry Preserves would be subject to search and confiscation at an airline check in security system? What was I going to do onboard the plane – smear everyone with it and then lick their faces?

I begged, I pleaded. “Don't take my Smucker's Cherry Preserves away from me. Take my wife instead. You can check her and I'll claim her later at the baggage claim area.”

But, no, they wouldn't hear of it. They said that my Smucker's was liquid in content and that the size of the small jar exceeded requirements. I told them that I was addicted to the product and for some reason it was never on the shelves of my favorite supermarket up north.

I was coming from my second home in Florida and had discovered Smucker's Cherry Preserves in a supermarket down there while doing routine food shopping with my wife. I never thought I would see that precious jar on the shelf because it never appeared in New Jersey.

Yes, I could find countless other types of jams and jellies ranging from boysenberry to orange preserves. But after trying all of them years ago I suddenly realized how much I really liked Smucker's Cherry Preserves. I could put it together with anything – margarine, butter, peanut butter, cream cheese, you name it. And the combination with Smucker's Cherry Preserves became a gourmet highlight for me. Nothing could beat it. Forget your crème Brule, your coq au vin, your goose pate.

I don't know how the Smucker's people could come up with so divine a product like their original Cherry Preserves, dangle it before me for long periods of time and then have it vanish totally from my local supermarkets up north.

Trust me, I wasn't really looking for it in Florida. Somehow I always salivated when I thought of this delicacy but since I couldn't find it any longer on supermarket shelves I tried some personal rehab to end my painful addiction. I normally don't even venture toward the jams and jellies section anymore because I knew that my Smucker's Cherry Preserves wouldn't be there. I've learned to settle for considerably less and my taste buds have rebelled ever since.

It was a supermarket we hadn't been to before and I walked down the jams and jellies section by mistake. And suddenly, as though the Smucker's Cherry Preserves flavor broke through the glass jar holding it just to find me, I saw it on the shelf.

I had to blink twice, three times to make certain that it wasn't a mirage and that the jar really said “Smucker's Cherry Preserves.” I stared at it. I said: “Where have you been, you unfaithful lover? I've looked for you for years. Don't you remember me? You always had me in the palm of your hand.”

When several other shoppers began to give me curious looks I started to whistle nonchalantly and immediately grabbed three jars off the shelf. I blinked again to make

certain that it was the real McCoy. I looked at the expiration date to make sure that they hadn't been sitting on the shelf for five years. I studied them carefully to see if any dust had gathered on the jars. I immediately thought that there must be a mistake, a problem of some sort.

When I took them to be checked out along with the other food, I casually asked the clerk if these jars were fresh. She looked at me quizzically and said, "Sir, every item of food in this store is fresh."

When I started to jump up and down and do some dance steps I hadn't done in years I thought that she might summon security. But she just smiled and must have assumed that I was a snowbird with an advanced case of dementia.

So I took the three jars back to our place in Florida and for the next three days before we left I put Smucker's Cherry Preserves on every food item I ate to make up for lost time. I put it in my dry cereals, on hamburgers instead of ketchup, and in my orange juice in the morning. I simply couldn't get enough of it. The old addiction came back. But at least I had the supply once again.

Knowing that I wasn't going to be back in Florida for many months I decided to take one of the jars back north with me and put it in my carry on bag. When I put the bag into the screening device they asked me if I had any liquids in it. I said none at all, not considering Smucker's Cherry Preserves a liquid.

Then the bells and whistles went off and I found myself surrounded by a phalanx of security guards. I asked myself what I had done wrong and why they were closing in on me. I put my hands in my pockets and realized that I hadn't taken a few coins out and put them in the bin.

"I apologize," I said. "These coins were pretty far down in my pocket. But here they are."

One of the burly guards gave me an uncomplimentary look. "It's not the coins we found. Did you pack your own bag?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "I don't have anything in there that you'd be interested in."

"Open that bag, if you don't mind." I sighed while my wife was watching intently. Don't worry dear, I thought to myself, I'm not packing hand grenades or AK-47's. I'm a law abiding citizen and understand the need for tight airline security.

They opened my bag and immediately pulled out the jar of Smucker's Cherry Preserves. "Sir, you can't take this on board. This is a liquid and the size of the jar is in violation of present regulations."

I was aghast. "But it's a jar of Smucker's Cherry Preserves," I said. "I can't get it where I live and found some down here. I'm only going to put it on bread. I wasn't thinking of doing anything radical on the plane with it. Honest, I wasn't planning to open it during the flight. It would stay in my bag until we got home."

The security guard wouldn't budge. "Sir, you have the choice of checking the jar which means you'd have to get off this line and return to the terminal. Or we're just going to have to confiscate it."

Confiscate my Smucker's? I've never had anything confiscated from me in my entire life. And now they're going to take the crown jewel of my palate away from me? What kind of justice is this in America, I thought?

"Please," I said. "I can't find this up north and have been looking for it for years now. I thought Smucker's had discontinued making this product, but there it was on a shelf down here. Don't do this to me. I love Smucker's Cherry Preserves, don't you see? You don't need to take it away from me."

"Sir, you're holding up the line. All these people have flights to catch. What's your decision? Go back to the terminal and check it? Or have it confiscated?"

I looked at my watch. We were on a tight schedule and our flight was set to leave in a very short time. I wouldn't have enough time to dash back to the terminal, put a baggage claim check on my Smucker's and dash back through security.

I was in a tight bind and had to make a decision. My wife wasn't very helpful when she kept reminding me that we would miss our flight. I was actually very tempted to miss our flight and get the next one out so long as I could somehow find a way to get that Smucker's home with me.

But the fact is that this precious product had in fact only cost me about three dollars at the supermarket. Real tears were coming out of my eyes as I made the fateful decision: "Okay, confiscate it, but I'll never forgive you for this most unreasonable act," I told the security guards.

As I looked back I could swear I saw the security guards arguing as to which of them would get to keep the Smucker's. It was a painful thought to me that one of them would be spreading my Smucker's on his toast the following morning – and laughing derisively at the passenger who had to give it up.

I was heart broken. I would have to wait six months until I got to Florida to plunge into the other two rare Smucker's. I began to think that maybe there was a reason to head back to Florida that much sooner – like within a week.

When I got home I had recurring nightmares about what went down at the airport. I dreamt about getting ready to chomp into ham and Smucker's Cherry Preserves only to have avenging angels fly off with it. As the Rolling Stones song goes, you can't always get what you want.

