



DEVAN A. NORRIS

A LAST GOODBYE

Warning: This is not my regular piece. Ordinarily I write about the lighter side of life. This month will be my exception, and I apologize to anyone looking for my regular banter. I will return to it soon, but sometimes you have to talk about the difficult stuff. The loss of a friend is one of the most challenging events. In almost every pilot's experience, he or she says goodbye

to someone who has helped them to develop into the aviator they are today. One of those goodbyes came to me this spring when I lost a dear friend and mentor in an airplane accident. It is a loss I have thought about every day since.

My mother has often told me people are in your life for a reason, a season, or a lifetime. It is inevitable that not every person of the hundreds you will fly with during your career is going to be a permanent part of your life. In truth, even though you will be working closely together for hours upon hours over a span of days or weeks, after your trip is over you will perhaps not see them or work together again for months or even years—or possibly ever again.

Many of the people we meet are just passing through our lives, often because we do not have the luxury of time with those whom we wish to know better. This is a sad reality, as you can actually become isolated from the very people with whom you have the most in common. It is necessary to put time and effort into developing relationships with people. Crew members have an especially hard time because there is only a limited opportunity to get to know each other while you are on a trip together. Thankfully, this is not always true. There are rare and precious exceptions, people who are “old friends who’ve just met,” and they can change your life.

Sometimes we meet a person who instantly engages us and inspires us to do more, to be more of ourselves than we ever were before. Someone who listens to your fears and concerns and doesn't laugh at them but teaches you how to laugh at them yourself. This person can pronounce you capable and adventurous and brave, and you believe them. For many others, and for me, that person was lost to us this spring, and her name was Anne. She died being all of the things that she told us we could be. She was flying, being her own capable and adventurous and brave self, and living her life with passion and joy.

Those qualities that Anne possessed in abundance—and that I wish to emulate—were things that I got to know because she took the time to get to know me. She went out of

her way to see the potential in everyone, and to help people see their potential. This was a huge part of who she was, both as a pilot and as a person. Anne's own fire for aviation was not ignited until she was in her late 30s, when another pilot with the same gift for inspiration in others took her for the flight that lit the flame.

That fire became her vocation, her career, and an abiding joy she never tired of sharing with others. For a fellow or even future aviator that joy is infectious and tangible, and makes it unthinkable that any of your dreams are beyond your reach. Finding your vocation, at any age, is a gift, and the ability to share your joy and love for that vocation even more so.

Although she had retired from her career as an airline pilot a year earlier, retirement for Anne was just something she had to do when the calendar said to—like paying taxes. Something you are required to do, and then get on with everything else you want to do. For her, it was an opportunity for new adventure and the pleasure of spending time with the people she loved. In Anne's life, that was a lot of people. She was able to remind us all that life itself is a gift, and one that we only hold for a short while. You must live with your eyes wide open to make sure that you are actually living your life, and not just along for the ride.

When the inevitable loss comes, we know that we cannot replace that person in our lives, and we don't want to try. The part of me that is missing can only be refilled by trying, at least in some way, to be the mentor and role model to others that she was to me, and to keep her memory alive. Cherish the people who want to help you succeed, and make sure they know how important they are to you. Encourage and foster that same joy and spirit in others, and they will do the same. Ultimately, that we made a difference in someone's life is the best legacy that anyone can ask for.

Blue skies, Anne. ➔

.....
Devan A. Norris, WAI 13890, is a first officer for a major airline on the B737, and an apprentice air show air boss.

My mother has often told me people are in your life for a reason, a season, or a lifetime.