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[Home](#) > George Mitchell makes impact on air safety, years after near deportation to Ja

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He escaped being deported through the benevolence of a judge in Manhattan, New York in the United States (US), as well as an attorney with Catholic Charities in Brooklyn.

Today, George Mitchell is making a significant difference in the safety of the airline industry, as well as Blue Origin space programme.

“Nowadays, I review design documents and implementation to evaluate compliance against requirements, development processes, design standards and any industry standards to establish the level of compliance, documenting shortcomings and recommendations to achieve 100 per cent compliance,” Mitchell told **The Gleaner**.

Mitchell is a senior real-time embedded safety critical systems engineer. His job is to make sure that all the systems – electrical and computer - on airplanes meet the standards of safety to take off and land.

“Even the back seat television monitors on aircraft that you watch throughout your flight, I have to check to ensure that everything is fine,” he said.

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“I evaluate the artefacts, looking for weaknesses in design that might lead to incorrect fault detection leading to unmitigated failures.”

He said the artefacts he needs to conduct his evaluation, from conceptual design to test results, are available in databases accessible from any secure location, allowing him to work remotely from his home office with some amount of on-site visits to the clients’ sites to audit certain activities (trust but verify).

“I don’t work directly on the mechanical components, only on sensors that monitor their precise operation and the computer systems that evaluate the proper outcomes. Every conceivable event has to be anticipated and evaluated for accurate fault mitigation,” he said.

## EDUCATION

Mitchell's journey began in Higgins Town, St Ann, where he was born. He grew up in Fletchers Land (now Beverley Gardens). He attended Kingston Senior School and later Kingston Technical High School before attending The College of Arts, Science and Technology (now the University of Technology, Jamaica) on a scholarship provided by Esso.

After graduating school, he worked for Aluminium Partners of Jamaica (ALPART), assisting in its start-up operation. From there, he went to bauxite company Revere Partners, which later closed in 1975.

In 1971, Mitchell headed to New York, arriving on a visitor visa and intending to continue his studies. He enrolled at Polytechnic University in Brooklyn to obtain a bachelor's degree in engineering. He was told that, by enrolling in school, he could apply to change his visa from visitor to student. This he did, but was denied. He appealed the decision but was again denied and ordered deported.

"I had one semester to go to complete my degree," he told **The Gleaner**.

That is when the attorney from Catholic Charities stepped in to help. Going before the judge in a Manhattan court, the judge decided against signing the deportation order, providing he completed the last semester and returned to Jamaica of his own free will.

He would complete the semester and return in 1975, but he was planning to return to the US to pursue his master's degree.

He received a full scholarship from Howard University but was unable to accept because his family was facing eviction from their Fletchers Land home. He took a job with the Jamaica Public Service Company and moved his family to Valentine Gardens.

## CROSSOVER

During this time, he began taking flying lessons and was to complete the process of obtaining his pilot licence at Rutair Aviation.

Mitchell returned to Polytechnic Institute on a student's visa and received student loans so he could study for his master's in management.

On graduation, he headed to Los Angeles, California to join a micro-computer revolution that was just getting started.

He told **The Gleaner** that, after spending several years developing computer hardware and software for the general computer environment, he crossed over into the avionics world of safety critical systems software engineering.

He was to start his own company in order to bring affordable data processing to small businesses, providing income tax preparation, general accounting, medical laboratory management and development of a verification and validation of safetycritical systems software.

His work over the years has included working in the certification of Real Time Embedded Software for safety critical systems in avionics, including the planes on which we fly.

“Recently, I worked as part of the audit team auditing the real-time embedded systems software for the first Blue Origin Rocket that was launched recently,” he told **The Gleaner**.

Mitchell told **The Gleaner** that, in the US, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and SpaceForce manage the skies above the US and only certified crafts are allowed access. Mitchell’s job is to evaluate compliance before they are allowed in the skies.

He is looking next to work on electric vertical take-off and landing aircrafts.

However, even with all the critical work that he does to ensure that the skies are safe, he still finds time to give back to UTech where he is part of the mentoring programme. He is also looking, in partnership with other past students of Kingston Technical High School, to make a significant impact on that institution.

“The Jamaican education system provided me with the tools necessary to reach where I am today, and the least that I can do is give back to the youth of Jamaica,” he told **The Gleaner**.

So, the next time you fly, bear in mind that the safety system of the aircraft you are on, to allow it to take to the sky, might have been certified by Jamaican George Mitchell.

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