

“For Auld Lang Syne”

Marijane Sipple

I have always been amazed that the traditional New Year’s Eve song “Auld Lang Syne” dates back to the 16th century and was not formally written down until 1788 when Scottish poet Robert Burns incorporated it into one of his works. He submitted it to the Scots Musical Museum to preserve the lyrics forever. The popularity of the Scottish tune, now sung around the world, will last forever! We all wish to remember friends from the past and not let them be forgotten.

At the beginning of 2018 I received a telephone call from Tom Anusewicz, who now lives in Hawaii. I had not been in touch with him for almost 40 years. He told me about the website he was developing about Antilles Air Boats. He wanted to preserve photographs and memories of people associated with AAB and American Inter-Island and discover what became of them after leaving AAB. He was hoping everyone he could find would send him photographs as well as their memories of that time.

I promised to search for anything I could find. His request was very therapeutic for me as Vince had passed away a few months before and I was trying to cope with his loss and brooding about what I should do next. Now I had a purpose.

Soon another I got another call from a voice from the past. Steve Kern phoned from Spokane, Washington. Steve is the only person I know who was a good friend and pilot with both Dave Howard and Vince Sipple at American Inter-Island. That makes him the Eagle at the top of my totem pole. Steve, his wife Trudy, and their adorable daughter Becca were special to us.

Now when I receive an email from “Flyfamily7” I know Steve is sending me more interesting aviation stories or videos, or the latest news of his “Flyfamily.” Becca, who got her start as a junior flight attendant with Jacquie Landis and Peggy Cunningham on the American Inter-Island Convair 440, later flew as a flight attendant for Air Wisconsin, Continental, and Frontier.



Becca, Samantha and Sean



A.J. and Veronica Bierzonski and their two boys

She married United Airlines Captain Sean Selmon. Her sister, Samantha, is a United Airlines flight attendant. Veronica, the youngest daughter, is married to Lt. Col. A.J. Bierzonski, Base Commander of the 19th Logistics Readiness Squadron at Little Rock AF Base, where they live with their two sons.

I was stunned when an email came from David Howard! I thought it must be a scam and only opened it because I was overcome by curiosity. I am happy that I did because it was from Dave's oldest son, who I had always known as "Skipper." He has lived in Washington, D. C. for many years and worked for the past four mayors there, currently as Project Manager for the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Development.

I was soon in touch with Dave's other children. When I first met his daughter Mitzi she was in high school and taking flying lessons from Dave. When I last saw Mitzi, she was working as a USAF doctor. Mitzi retired as a Colonel after serving 20 years as a USAF doctor. She still works as head of obstetrics and gynecology at a civilian hospital in Washington, D.C. Mitzi and her husband Ron Fries live on a farm north of Washington. They are both pilots and have their own Cessna 172.

John Howard at 15 years
old in St. Croix



John Howard, the youngest, and his family live near Vancouver, WA, where he works for a laser tech company. John retired from the USAF after 20 years, and also spent four years in the USCG. He was delighted to find the AAB's website so he could show his family photos of Dave at AAB. He has fond memories of the time he spent living on St. Thomas and felt the website was a tribute to Dave's legacy and the accuracy of his own memories there.

Because of scams I never open emails or answer phone calls from anyone I don't know. If they leave a message and I want to contact them, I return the call. In June (2021) I was sitting next to the telephone when it rang, and I automatically answered. The caller identified himself as "Greg Ross." I paused, trying to recall if I knew a Greg Ross. Then he added, "I was Sean's friend in Hawaii." Even though it was almost 50 years ago, I instantly remembered my son's friend.

Greg's parents, Ed and Mary Beth Ross, were the first to welcome us to Hawaii when we arrived at Hickam AFB marina after sailing from Long Beach Naval Base. We must have looked like a crew of Salty Sailors because they invited us to their home for cold drinks and hot showers. Our son, Sean, was happy to meet their son, Greg. Finally, he had someone his age to be with after a 24-day confinement on a 26-foot boat with three adults!



Greg saw my photo on the AAB's website, and somehow recognized me and managed to track me down. It has been fun getting his emails with photos from his flights as an American Airlines Captain on the Boeing 737-800 and 737 Max8. I loved the photo he sent of landing at St. Thomas with its extended 7,000-foot runway. When I was flying for American Inter-Island the

runway was 4,650-feet. I had a bird's eye view of the construction. Unfortunately, when the work was finished so was American Inter-Island.

Returning to St. Thomas to see all the changes would be fun, but after considering it, I decided I'd be happier remembering things as they were when I lived there!

I was really happy when Greg told me he had a layover in Jacksonville in early November and wondered if he could come visit me and take me to lunch. I could not wait to see him as a 58-year-old man and wondered if I would recognize him. Would he recognize me at age 82? It was a wonderful visit, and I was amazed hearing about present day flying, enhanced by looking at photos on his iPad. The only drawback was that we went through them too fast, and I wanted to take my time and hear more about each one. Of course, that would have made Greg miss his flight.

*"But we can follow the poignant instructions
Offered in 'Auld Lang Syne': to remember the past,
the stories, the scenes, the settings, the friendships,
and the family.*

*Perhaps knowing that these memories live on in all of us
makes the 'times gone by' a little easier to bear."*

-Allyson Hobbs