



Mother Daughter DUO

BY KATIE WRITER

Years have passed since taking my daughter, Wren, for her first airplane ride. It was a cold flight in late fall, and I recall her being bundled up in many layers, wearing headphones we would typically use for firing up the snow machine or chainsaw. For many flights later, she would bounce energetically in her father's hands, squeezed in the back seat of the Super Cub. The hum of the engine was something she knew from many hours of flying together during pregnancy. Looking out the window and taking in the bird's-eye view seemed to stimulate her, and she did not fall asleep in the car seat as many children do with the hum of an engine.

One thing that has not changed, is how special each of these flights together are. There were some phases of whether or not she was enthusiastic to join me on flying adventures close to home. Both she and her brother, Jasper, were comfortable together in the back seat, sharing turns with the headset in which they could talk to me on the intercom. We'd all squeeze in just to get out for an airplane ride. A summer flight would likely include swimming in Alaska lakes and jumping off a floatplane. This type of flight was one of many memorable adventures together. Though, I can't forget the motivation and prodding it took for us to get out the door!

We live in Talkeetna, Alaska, which is a special place where three glacier-fed rivers meet, including the Susitna, Chulitna, and Talkeetna Rivers. The Chulitna flows out of the Alaska Range and the other two flow out of the east, including the Talkeetna Mountains. It's relatively flat, with the Upper Sustina Valley and the rising terrain of those mountain ranges offering almost surreal scenic backdrops. For us, short and sweet flights often gave us the lift to our day or week.

For the past several years, Wren has brought her camera. She surprised me early on with her keen eye without taking too many images, a common habit of digital technology. She kept the wing struts out of the image and a straight horizon without even an edit. Many flights, she'd just go for the ride, taking in the moment of the passing landscape that changed daily. We'd go to our favorite berry-picking spot and fill up on wildy delicious blueberries, staining our fingertips, lips, and pants with dark hues of rich blue.

For many years, I'd use the airplane to offer support flights for a friend's hiking business, Denali Trekking Company. One knows the advantages of Super Cubs to go places that limit other bigger aircraft. Small lake drop-offs honed my skills by dropping campers, guides, and gear, and then taking off empty. When I was busier flying others, I'd get the hint my kids wanted to go delighting me that they enjoyed flying too.

Gradually, I developed my aerial photography busi-

ness, Visionary Adventures, LLC. I worked as a radio news reporter for KTNA Talkeetna for five years, and many of my photographs told the story of fires, floods, and most often inspiration. Aerial photography of wilderness offers visual delight that also perks up the viewer in an understanding of the landscape intricacies an earth dweller yearns to see. My privileged vantage point allowed me to share with others my love of these views, and inspire an appreciation for the natural world. It prompted me to create a website and upload hundreds of images of glaciers, wild rivers, the Talkeetna mountains, and uniquely shaped lakes.

My flights were all photo missions and gave me a sense of purpose and reason to burn avgas. They fed my soul immeasurably and often were just me and my bird, N4121Z. We travelled into zones that felt like mythical air dragons accompanied us. And despite my remoteness, I never once felt alone. When I shared this perch with passengers in the back seat, I did not get into the zone of photographing the landscape as much as I did when alone. Except for with my two children, there was so often magic in the air. We could hardly believe what we experienced was real or just a dream. The magic included circular rainbows, rain showers out of nowhere, sunlight glimmering on lakes, eagle close encounters, and a flight when Jasper and I saw over 20 bears as they were getting ready to den up. I wonder if they still remember these amazing phenomena as I do.

One day, Wren joined me on a flight into the Alaska Range to photograph the Ruth Glacier. Photos were needed for a story on climate change and how pilots' observations add to scientific data of the rapid changes of our time. As we entered the Ruth Glacier, time slowed down over textured glaciers of late summer.

▶ At a young age, Katie's daughter Wren (now 14 years old) has brought her camera and keen eye to photograph the beautiful Alaskan landscapes.





▶ Aerial photography of Alaska gives Katie and Wren the opportunity to share their privileged vantage point. Katie has uploaded hundreds of images of glaciers, wild rivers, the Talkeetna mountains, and uniquely shaped lakes on her website.

With the cloud ceiling blocking the upper visual treats of North America's highest peak, Denali, we both snapped photos while magic was in the air. A rainbow over the Tokosha Mountains called in the angelic forces, and we felt surrounded by an ethereal beauty different than our usual river tours closer to home. Those images solidified that memorable flight and added hope to a story of climate change.

Any photographer knows that moment when they got *the shot*. We put our cameras away and gawked at the view for the remainder of the flight, until I realized Wren was Facetiming her friend. While we were headed over to the Kahiltna Glacier, she had better cell phone reception than our own home!

Later, we added a few of these photographs to our website. I created files for both Wren and Jasper to host their own creativity and even make some money when one of their photos sells. Like many teenagers, a focus on friends and Instagram feeds may have more of Wren's attention than building her photography portfolio. I do hope she uses her photography skills down the road. Most importantly, I hope that these flying adventures give her unforgettable experiences as a mother daughter duo.

When I look back at what motivated me to create a special activity together, as often a father and son do in the pursuit of hunting animals, Wren and I have started our own special bond of a rewarding activity. Flying with a camera is our connection. And for anyone



curious, our main camera with the most reliable and superior images are not from our bulky and expensive Canon Single Lens Reflex cameras, but our tried and true, always in our pocket—cell phones. →

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Katie Writer, WAI 11711, is a journalist, pilot, photographer sharing her unique Alaskan adventures with our AFW readers. Her creations, as well as Wren's and Jasper's photos, are available on Katie's online art gallery at www.KatieWriterGallery.com.