

## Fresh Air Matters... with Capt. Yaw

I grew up at the end of the line; the end of a railway line, that is. It was a sleepy town, about twenty thousand people, a stony beach with crashing waves, lots of old-people's homes and surrounded by agricultural activity. I did not know then that the town had a VOR station, but I did know that there was a railway station and that my town was 'the end of the line'.

It is my belief that true self-motivation comes from ambition and, at some point, the constant exposure to the railway line triggered an ambition in me to become a train driver. It did not last long; probably from the age of four for a year or two, but that does not matter any more. From wanting to be a train driver (because I liked to watch the long, snake-like contraption which swallowed people each morning and regurgitated them in timely fashion each night), I then wanted to be a veterinary officer. Why? Because my pet was sick and the Vet seemed to have a cool job making dogs better. That lasted a few years until I discovered plants. I was given a cactus – that was cool; a plant that can survive in the harshest of conditions. I wanted to know more and more. I won prizes with my collection and my knowledge grew, my ambition to become a specialist in growing rice now fuelled my efforts at school and I won prizes at school and in the community. My ambitions moved on by force-majeure after an accident left me in a wheel chair for a while and I discovered engineering. Living in a country at war (the Falklands war) led to working in the defence industry as a robotics engineer, and with it the deep discovery of aircraft. I worked on a major project related to the Nimrod aircraft; it was fascinating – truly fascinating.

As a child my ambitions were always present, morphing, growing and developing based upon my exposures, creating the motivation needed to succeed. Because of it, I had worked hard at school, gaining new knowledge daily, needing and wanting to remember as many facts and figures as possible, consuming theory upon theory in order to feed my yearning to succeed. Above all, understanding and retaining the knowledge for use at a moment's notice for many years to come – not just for an exam. Later, I learned to fly and was able to combine my previous ambition-stimulated learning to become an aircraft engineer, pilot and flying instructor, discovering with it my 'aviation-nirvana-in-Ghana'.

Interestingly, not long after I started learning to fly, I thought about becoming an 'air-tro-tro' driver. You know, somebody who picks up people from one location and takes them to another, back and forth daily. But then I discovered that being an 'air-racing' driver was more interesting – especially if you got to teach people along the way. To put this into other terms, I considered being an airline pilot, but realised that being a display pilot was more interesting and pulled on a greater range of my skills, and thus I also became a flying instructor!

The display work is about split-second decision-making and high safety awareness in a very limited horizontal and vertical space, working to time limitations in terms of seconds, in relation to positioning and manoeuvring. These skills enable me to be more in control of the aircraft and provide for a much safer training environment, since recovery techniques are more current and more developed.

Why all of this on a Monday morning in a business newspaper? Last week, I was privileged and honoured to take a staff member to Austria to become the first woman to achieve a certain qualification. I taught Patricia to fly, and she flies really well. I also taught her to build aircraft, which she excels at too. She has ambition, and desire to succeed and it drives her to success, which is good too! Because of this she has gained much experience in aircraft engine installation, maintenance and repair and was ready to represent this

continent on a prestigious aircraft engine training course. But she had never been on an international flight.

I had warned Patricia before setting out that flying in the airliners is comparatively boring compared to flight school, crop spraying, surveillance, aerial photo-video and banner-towing (tasks she is familiar with). Nonetheless, her interest levels were high and her spirits rose even higher as we checked in. The wait to embark at Gate One onto the Lufthansa flight from Kotoka was punctuated with interest-moments involving the ground-handling activities visible from the window. Later, passenger-boarding, seat-selection and stowing of baggage created raised anticipation. The kick-in-the-back acceleration as we raced along Runway 21 for take-off brought a great smile.

As we climbed, she strained her head to watch the flaps retract and discussed the mechanisms for the retraction and locking of the undercarriage as we felt and heard the 'dangly bits' settle into their underbelly seats. This was followed by six hours of 'same-same', punctuated by the occasional 'aerial-pot-hole' or turbulence. The plane slowed, the descent started and the servos and hydraulics started their transformation work upon the wing shape, and then the gear descended. This sparked a spontaneous landing checklist from the 'back-row-seat pilot' of 'Brakes off, undercarriage down and locked, engines, fuel, instruments, temperatures, communicate, hatches and harnesses' from the lips of the first-timer next to me, unaware that I too was running the checks in my head. The landing and taxi in the grey morning light of Frankfurt lead to neck-contorting attempts to see Europe from a porthole. A few moments glancing at the glass cockpit of the Airbus, and it was off the plane into a photocopy world of airport life around the globe.

A few days later, all I heard was 'I want to go home. I miss my planes. I want to fly.' Despite the excitement and accomplishments this young lady was achieving and the thrill of international travel, she wanted to be back in the workshop and on the little grass airfield at Kpong – because, for her, it is far more interesting and challenging than working the 'Air-Tro-Tro' life. When Patricia says she wants to fly, she means she wants to *really* fly: take off and land on a small dirt strip, navigate by map and compass, fly missions that build the rural communities of Ghana, and teach others too.

Thankfully, on our roads, we have bus-drivers, tro-tro drivers, private drivers, racing drivers, driving instructors, and learners. Likewise, we have airline pilots, helicopter pilots, agricultural pilots, private pilots, flying instructors, display pilots, test pilots and student pilots for the air; a mix as essential as a gourmet meal. Nonetheless, I believe that Patricia and I live and work in the sweetest part of the meal of aviation, and that Patricia has just learnt that the main course may sound exciting and be necessary, but the oft-overlooked dessert is much more interesting to be a part of!!

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