

For Mike:

In December of 2020 I received a call from Ryan Reeves, the current President of the Arizona Airports Association (AzAA) asking me if I could write a Memorial for Mike Klein for the AzAA website. I accepted with honor and I set off to work. What was I to say? I did not want to write or summarize an obituary because that had already been done. Please don't get me wrong, Mike's obituary was wonderful and well appreciated, but I wanted to say more. I thought that I could relate a personal story to you, give you some measure of the person, but to do that I have to share some of my story with you...

I graduated from my University of Arizona in Tucson in May of 1983 and quickly returned to my family home outside of Chicago, Illinois to begin my career. I found a job working for a Civil engineering consultant located in downtown Chicago, right in the middle of "the loop". I was working in the Bridge group but my firm mainly did transportation projects, mostly road improvements for the State and many municipalities. They also had a project working for the Chicago Department of Aviation, designing a new, short, taxiway connector at O'Hare airport, and they needed help doing it. I was fascinated by it so I volunteered to be on the team. A few days later someone dropped off a roll of plans at my desk for me to review. I unrolled the plans and on the cover sheet were the words "O'Hare International Airport". Something happened to me that day. I had not even opened the plans, or had visited the jobsite or even read the Scope of Work. Something happened to me like happened to the Grinch, "who gained the strength of 10 Grinches, plus 2 that day. I had the fever. I had the fever for Aviation, and I had it bad.

I told Mike this story one day after I had joined ADOT. He laughed about it with me. He had the fever too, and he had had it for decades.

I relocated back to Tucson in 1987 because I wanted to be in Arizona. I was working for a couple of consultants before landing a job with one seeking a full time Aviation Engineer. That firm would later be acquired by Stantec. I worked there for over 20 years doing nothing but Aviation work. I was learning my craft working for about 10 years under Mark Koester. That was a good decade. As I advanced I joined AzAA (Mike was one of the founders) and set my sights on getting to know as many people as I could. Gary Adams was the Manager of Aeronautics then and I did not know Mike at all. Mike later became the Manager and I worked hard to get to know him. He was professional and pleasant but he kept newer consultants at arm's length. Even though I knew that he had a large circle of friends it seemed that I could make little progress.

After 22 years, I decided to leave Stantec and take on a new challenge. I worked for a couple of different firms but decided that I really wanted something more. I had heard (through Mike, I think) that the State would soon be hiring a new State Aviation Engineer. The position had been vacant for a couple of years and Mike was finally able to get the position funded. I had been a consultant for about 30 years and just like my epiphany with O'Hare Airport earlier, I knew that I had to be the State Airport Engineer.

I called Mike and set an appointment to talk about the position before it was advertised. I took a day off work, hopped in my car and made the drive up to the Capitol Complex. I met him in his office and we chatted. We talked about the particulars of the position. APMS. Oversight. Project review. Grand Canyon. Process. Timing. All of it. But mostly, we talked about Vision. He talked about where the Group was heading, how to maximize the use of the Aviation fund and what major planning projects ADOT would do to benefit Aviation in the State. We were on the same page and we both knew it. I told Mike that I really wanted the job. He looked at me and laughed. He told me that "you really have to love Aviation to want this job because ADOT will not pay you sh**"!". We laughed together. I think that tells you much more about Mike than it does about me. I would soon resign my position with my existing firm, even without securing the ADOT position. I would soon be unemployed. Mike on the other hand had worked for ADOT for over 16 years at that time. It was obvious that he loved what he was doing for the Aviation community and that he had the fever badly, like me.

I was offered the position of State Airport Engineer and joined ADOT in April of 2016. I told Mike that I would work a minimum of five years and he was ecstatic to have me join the team. I spent days with him learning all that I could about each program and the processes of ADOT. Mike showed unbelievable patience with me (that's absolutely true!).

For the first few months I would spend time in Mike's office several times a week, and we would talk about Vision. How could we grow the programs? Where did we want the group to go? How we could get the grant managers more involved with the processes? NASAO? The FAA? What planning studies were most needed and which ones we could move forward with? Which ones would be most beneficial to the aviation community? The State Aviation System Plan (SASP), the Triennial study, APMS, Updated Aeronautical Charts, an Economic Impact Study and a Land Use Study were all tagged to move forward, and all are either complete or underway in some fashion today. I began to realize that Mike was not an administrator. He was not a manager. Mike was a Dreamer.

Mike became ill in January of 2017 and retired after 17 years at ADOT the following July. I rarely saw him during that period as the chemo made him very, very sick. It took all of his effort just to get to his treatments. Later that fall, however, something incredible had happened, Mike started getting better. The tumors shrunk and the pain eased. His doctors reduced his chemo dose and reduced its frequency. He became better still and started to become active again. Every few weeks we would get together for lunch and he insisted on paying (we later agreed to alternate). He had lost all of his hair and I laughed. I told him that he would never go back and gave him a tube of sun block to use before he left the house. He laughed right with me. Amazingly, Mike did not seem depressed. He was not bitter. He never really complained about his illness or the terrible effects of the chemo and the medications. Mike was actually optimistic. He was glad to be alive and he wanted to help the group in some way. He offered to mentor me through my transition into the Manager of the group, and, of course he wanted to talk more about Vision.

I found a way to bring Mike back to work for ADOT under a temporary services contract. He began feeling even better and had begun entering into local poker tournaments at one of the valley casinos. He even took a few long weekends in Vegas for some tournaments at the Venetian. I gathered from his

smile that he was a pretty good poker player and was doing well for himself, or at least was not losing. He was happy again and he even bought himself a new car. I needed all kinds of help in the group but I only asked Mike to help with the things he was interested in. I let him work from home (pre-COVID) and asked him to stop by about once per week or so. When he did stop in he would make his way into my office and begin asking about the planning projects. He would usually show up just before lunch but I did not mind. We would head downtown and sit down somewhere for a meal and catch up and talk about planning. This is where his interest was and so that is what he began working on. He wanted to see projects like the Economic Impact Study, the Land Use Study and APMS all to advance and succeed. After COVID, I told Mike not to come in to the office at all anymore. Teleworking would be sufficient so that's what he did. As summer began Mike began feeling worse and I noticed that a few weeks might go by without him billing any work. I called him and asked him to the best he could and not worry about his work. He told me that he could get back to it as soon as he felt a little better and wanted to know what he could help with next. I told him that I had extended his contract another year and that I really needed his help. He was happy.

Ironically, Mike ended up working longer for me at ADOT than I had worked for him. He started calling me "Boss", but I always knew who The True Leader was. Rest in Peace my good friend.

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