

Christopher J. Nicholas, '73

On January 22, 1972, I had a blind date with the most extraordinary man I have ever met. When I first saw Chris in the stairwell of his dorm at the Air Force Academy, I could only think of three words: tall, dark, and handsome. Chris was a second classman that year and was majoring in Astronautics. He was a member of the 24th Squadron. He graduated 73rd in the class of 1973.

Chris and I married soon after his graduation and lived in Del Rio, Texas for four years where Chris received his pilot training and served as a T-38 instructor with "N" flight.

In 1978, Chris was assigned a position flying the F-15. He was stationed in Bitburg, Germany after receiving his training at Holloman AFB in New Mexico and Luke AFB in Arizona. He was with the 22nd squadron at Bitburg. He seemed to be a natural born fighter pilot and adapted so very well to the job.

Unfortunately, he felt the need to request a hardship discharge before the end of his tour at Bitburg due to the sudden death of his father. Because of his strong sense of family, Chris wanted to return home to Durham, Calif. To help his mother manage her almond orchards. He loved farming, but also wanted to return to flying once the family business was organized.

In 1985, Chris applied and was offered a position with the 312th Air Force Reserve Squadron at Travis Air Force Base. He flew the C-5 Galaxy for the 312th for fourteen years. The squadron was activated in 1990 due to the Gulf War. Chris flew many missions including a flight to Mogadishu, Somalia in the early 1990s.

In 1985, Chris also accepted a position to fly for a commercial airline called Pacific Southwest Airline or PSA. PSA was later purchased by US Airways where Chris was employed until his death. Chris flew many domestic positions, but later in his career he enjoyed flying the European routes and frequently flew passengers to London, Rome, and Paris. During a good portion of his career as an airline pilot, Chris was an instructor in the course of Crew Resource Management, also called CRM. In these courses, he taught the fundamentals of crew responsibility. The particular purpose of the courses was a focus on safety and how an airline crew can coordinate their functions to promote safety.

While Chris was building his career as a pilot, we had three children and lived in the small community of Vacaville, Calif. Respect for others and a strong sense of honesty and integrity are reflected every day in his three children: Courtney, Christopher and Dana. They have found their own careers in medicine, business and law. They are the legacy he has left behind.

After Chris' diagnosis of Lymphoma, he was on medical disability from the airline for about three years. He passed away from unforeseen complications of a bone marrow transplant at Stanford Hospital in Palo Alto, Calif. on August 26, 2009. The funeral services were held at St. Mary's Catholic Parish in Vacaville, Calif. A ceremony with military honors was held at the Sacramento Valley National Cemetery in Dixon, Calif. There was a huge turnout from the community of Vacaville, his friends and colleagues at Travis AFB, his fellow airline pilots at US Airways and the friends of his children whom he watched grow up. His friends from US Airways wore their airline uniforms out of respect for Chris. My children and I appreciate the warmth and comfort given to us in honor of Chris.

After 35 years of marriage to Chris, I realize he was so much more than tall, dark and handsome. *(Donna Nicholas, Chris' wife)*