

Sonoma County, California - (Excerpted from *Soul Searching*, Bert Botta, *Aviation International News*, 11/2001)

We're all looking for meaning in our lives. For aviators it's often as meaningful, yet relatively short-lived, as a flight well conducted; an instrument approach flown down to minimums, in lousy weather, to the completion of a satisfyingly professional flight.

Unfortunately, the pace of modern-day life, more often than not precludes any meaningful connection between people. Aviators are no exception. In fact, our world needs more connection than earthbound souls because of our "fly-by" life styles.

A meaningful relationship during my career at TWA was two crew members passing in the ramp office like ships in the night, yelling a promise over our shoulders to "Let's get in touch" as we sprinted in opposite directions for our commuter flights home; a well-intentioned but empty promise if there ever was one.

An example of someone "having the heart and taking the time to make a connection" was when my buddy John and I were out running the trails that weave through the primeval Redwood forests of Mt. Tamalpais, in Marin County, California.

After running the pavement up Highway 1 out of Mill Valley for a mile or so, we descended down into Muir Woods on one of the hundreds of deer trails that traverse the mountain. We were on our way to visit Roger, a friend of ours. Muir

Woods is a beautiful Redwood Forest preserve in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA).

Roger was a master carpenter and musician who built a beautiful redwood cabin in which he and his wife lived. They lived on the last remaining homestead in Muir Woods; when Roger and his wife passed away, his home reverted to the GGNRA.

The musician in him would open his home for a jam session every Sunday. Many of the musicians of the day, names like Janis Joplin, the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane and many others, showed up to jam with Roger.

As John and I descended the trail, we saw Roger working on the Greyhound bus he was converting into a luxurious touring vehicle for Neil Young, the musician.

As soon as he saw us round the last turn in the trail to his home, he dropped his tool belt and sprinted into the cabin to put on his running shoes.

Two minutes later, he came stumbling out, lacing up his running shoes, shouting, "Let's go!" The three of us headed up the trail for a beautiful 5 miler through the Redwoods.

For me, he "took the time to make a connection" with us. That seemingly simple act of dropping everything to join us on a run somehow validated us as important people in his life.

Roger passed away a few years ago. The cabin is gone. The music stopped. But these days, when I descend the mountain down into the glen where Roger's cabin used to be I swear I can still hear the melody of his "joyful spontaneity" resounding in my heart.

I never forgot him; he taught me a lesson about the power of personal connection that, every day, when I'm conscious enough, I attempt to "pay it forward"...

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