

December 12, 2010

Ben,

You have been a part of my journey in the US since our first day at Embry-Riddle during international student orientation. It wasn't until a few weeks later that we started to hang out with my best friend from home, Dani.

Ever since you have been part of my life looking back at the past almost seven years, you have been a school- friend, a roommate, a tutor, an instructor, a soul mate. You were always here for a chat and a laugh. We have spent countless hours discussing the world, the people, cultures, aviation, sports, and girls.

Early on you have shown me the importance and fun of the saying "You only live once". We have shared countless adventures together. We went on a night flight to Key West with Ponso, departing at 9pm, having dinner and countless memories on the Caribbean island of Key West, before returning to Daytona just after 6am the next morning. We have learned to surf together –went riding the swells of the hurricanes in 2004. You came to Switzerland, not once, but several times to exhaust yourself on the slopes with us and celebrate and laugh over warm drinks at night. We have learned to scuba dive in the springs of Florida and enjoyed the beautiful pictures of the world under the sea.

We have had many flying moments together. You have coached and guided me through my training. You were always there to help and showed me the true passion of aviation early on. It seems so unfair that you- the person that has taught me so much about safety, risks, and airmanship and proper aeronautical decision making – became a victim of a barely imaginable statistical impossibility.

The past few days have been emotional and difficult. The news so shocking and unbearable – just unreal. There are no words to describe the loss and empty feelings I have. I would love to sit over a coffee with you again and talk about the adventures, hopes and dreams, the future. You have always pulled me along, you pushed me to explore and discover. You have introduced me to so many of my friends here now. You are the reason so many things are the way they are in my life today. Now, I am left to move on without you and on my own. I will remember your spirit and continue our journey in life.

We just spent such good times together: just witnessed a beautiful wedding of our friends Dani & Laura; just competed against each other at the US National Aerobatic Championships; for the first time, just flown commercially together with Dani from Texas to Florida, discussing plans to start a business together; just experienced one of the most unique opportunities during an up close tour of the space shuttle program at NASA with Gisela; just flown an amazing flight in the Piper Cub to take some pictures of a house in Daytona; just spent hours sitting on the porch outside all night, drinking and toasting to great plans for our future and a vision that only you and I would share...

...so many great memories just within the past few weeks. We have shared so much in the last almost seven years that I can and will never forget. You have been my best friend during my best time in life. You were here while I found a true passion in a dream career, were here while I completed my university degrees, and were here as a friend and companion whenever I needed you.

There was so much more for us to do, so much more to go on and explore! I will continue our love for flying, for fun, for travelling, for learning, for taking pictures, and most important for smiling.

The two of us have a special bond and I feel Antoine de Saint-Exupery, in *The Little Prince*, best describes this unique memory and continued spirit we will always have:

*"People have stars, but they aren't the same. For travelers, the stars are guides. For other people, they're nothing but tiny lights. And for still others, for scholars, they're problems. For my businessman, they were gold. But all those stars are silent stars. You, though, you'll have stars like nobody else."*

*"What do you mean?"*

*"When you look up at the sky at night, since I'll be living on one of them, since I'll be laughing on one of them, for you, it'll be as if all the stars are laughing. You'll have stars that can laugh!"*

*And he laughed again.*

*"And when you're consoled (everyone is eventually consoled), you'll be glad you've known me. You'll always be my friend. You'll feel like laughing with me. And you'll open your windows sometimes just for the fun of it... And your friends will be amazed to see you laughing while you're looking up at the sky. Then you'll tell them, 'Yes, it's the stars. They always make me laugh!"*

Ben, my brother and my mate, I will always remember your smile and passion and am looking forward to our next meeting with the stars.

Always your friend,

Andrea