

REMARKS BY FRED MITCHELL MP
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Retirement of Augustine Roberts

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Gus Roberts is my friend and it dates back a very long time now, over forty years. As fate would have it, we were students together at a good school run by the Roman Catholic monks in East New Providence known to you all as St. Augustine's College.

But although the friendship began there, it did not really blossom there. I think now looking back in hindsight that when you are young, you don't really know what to do with friendship or what being friends really means. As you get older, having friends who you know and upon whom you can depend not for anything in particular becomes a rare favour, a specialty not to be scoffed at.

There are some really proud moments when you are able forty years after the fact to be able to walk into an office and know that face that you have known for so long; to be able to pick up the telephone and be able to call someone who knows you and knows you well and can get something done for you; to be able to boast that you know the Chief Justice. It really impresses the younger ones, and for an old man, it brings quite a joy in some very grim days.

In Gus' case and we have always just called him Gus, the friendship really blossomed after we left school. He and Michael Weech, Charles Beneby, Godfrey Turnquest all joined Bahamasair virtually night out of high school. It was a proud moment to always walk onto a Bahamasair aircraft and be able to know that you know the Captain of the aircraft and not just any aircraft but

a jet aircraft. It was quite a proud moment and I tell them all that today.

But today is for Gus who has done well in this job, superbly in fact. I can judge by the number of telephone calls I got for this function: of those who said, you must be here tonight. Captain Gus said this or Captain Gus said that. In fact, I got a note from the Chief Justice. So you see we have all arrived.

Gus and I got to meet because he left Bimini to come to school in Nassau. I don't think I really knew where Bimini was until I was an adult but it has become my home away from home and Gus loves Bimini.

Anyone who has travelled on that 737 with him as he sat in the left seat will know that just as the plane entered Bahamian airspace and if you are sitting on the left side of the aircraft, he will often dip the wings, banking to the left and say: "You are now entering The Bahamas and on the left is the gateway to The Bahamas the island of Bimini." It is simply a good feeling.

And the thing I like about him most is that he is the same way all the time: just pleasant to be around, and likes to have fun and great time. Just a good person to be around. I am sure he will be missed here at Bahamasair.

And this sunny disposition with Captain Gus is so even though he has had some really hard knocks in his life. One was the loss of his sisters in the Chalk's plane crash. One day he told me how he lost his second son in a tragic road traffic accident, and the thing left me so distressed and upset. I wondered how did he and his wife survive it. Another of our classmates told me as he looked back at his life having raised four sons in adulthood, he thought what a great time he had with them. And so I know against that thought that the death of Gus' son, philosophical though one has to be to survive, was a tough blow. But Mandela says seven times down, eight times up. That's Gus Roberts.

I have always wanted to be a politician. I have no other interest. Poor me. But the idea was to be able to help people and especially be in a position to help your friends. So when Gus told me that he was retiring; I think we may

even have been in Bimini last year when he said it, I thought that could not be possible. But it has been a long time come to think about it. He told me about the regs and how if they were changed to conform to the international rule which is now 65 he could stay on for a few more years.

Truth be told if I were in a position to do something about it, the regs. would have been changed. But alas I am not there, and in the result I can do nothing. This makes me sad.

Sad particularly since Gus is the man who said to me one day in Bimini as he was introducing me around as his classmate and he said that when we were in high school Fred Mitchell used to be our daddy... that is I used to be the President of the student council at SAC. That's when it was confirmed, the ties that bind us. I was and I am flattered beyond measure.

So tonight, the evening is tinged with some sadness but I glory in his success. I think he has done a great job for queen and country, for Bahamasair, for his family, for the Roman Catholic faith of which he is a part, for SAC, for all of us his friends and for Bimini.

I took the time to actually write these words to ensure that I covered all the things I remember about this great man Augustine Roberts my friend as I wish him well in his future work in our Bahamas.

There is still plenty of work for us to do.

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