

Albert Lee Ueltschi (d. 2012)

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September 18, 2012

Al Ueltschi – Aviation Training Pioneer Signs The Giving Pledge.

“Like FlightSafety International, HelpMeSee is focused on training. Instead of pilots, HMS intends to train thousands of cataract specialists in a miracle surgery that takes as little as 5 minutes and costs as little as \$35.”

By any possible measure, I have had an extraordinarily fortunate life (and a long one) for which I am very grateful. I couldn't be more thankful for the life I have been lucky enough to live in the best country in the world. If I didn't have ten bucks in the bank, I would still feel this way. I have been so fortunate in my professional life that I want to give it back to society in a meaningful way. So, I'm happy to sign on to the Giving Pledge, because every one of us has the opportunity — and the obligation — to make a difference by helping other people.

I started my life on a dairy farm in very modest circumstances, where there was an abundance of hard work and great love. My parents, Robert and Lena Ueltschi, nurtured in all of us a respect for one another and a deep sense of responsibility. They likewise nurtured each of our dreams and hopes. For me, that dream was to fly. It's hard to explain how utterly preposterous my idea of becoming a pilot would have seemed at the time. The Great Depression was on, and our family of nine lived on the thinnest of margins, and here I was, the youngest, jabbering on about flying airplanes. They encouraged my big idea. When I decided to start a hamburger stand called the “Kitty Hawk” to earn money for flying lessons, it was their faith in me that made it all possible.

I became a pilot, going from barnstorming, to commercial flying, eventually ending up at Pan American World Airways. It was the airline I most wanted to fly for, and from the moment I arrived, I knew that I'd found a home. It was my great luck to end up as the executive pilot to Juan Terry Trippe, the man who created Pan Am and a true aviation visionary. He started Pan Am in his twenties, and built it into the greatest airline that ever was in just a dozen years. I spent the next 25 years as his personal pilot, learning from this brilliant businessman who became my dear friend and mentor.

At Pan Am, safety of our passengers and crew was an obsession. As I spent more time as a corporate pilot, it was clear to me that there was a real need for training programs for corporate pilots similar to the kinds of training I received as a pilot at Pan Am. So, in 1951, with the encouragement of Mr. Trippe and the blessing of my wife, Eileen, I took out a \$15,000 mortgage on my house and opened FlightSafety. From the very first, we knew that what we were trying to do mattered. It was important to the industry and important to our clients. In the end, it was about saving lives.

As aviation grew, so did our business. Our business model evolved over time, but our fundamental beliefs did not. FlightSafety International was built on some guiding principles: striving to be the leader in our field; staying disciplined; and focusing on contributing something back to our customers and the industry. Its success was thanks to the contributions of remarkable and talented colleagues. I know for certain that I can never repay their trust, their patience and, in some cases, their forgiveness.

Building a business and raising a family can sometimes feel at odds with one another, but I was blessed beyond my wildest dreams by my wife, Eileen, and our four wonderful children. Their love and support for my vision of making a difference with FlightSafety were critical contributions that never showed up on any balance sheet, but were equally important to the success we achieved.

Vision is fundamental to so much of my life's work. It started with Orbis International 30 years ago when I lent a hand to transform an old DC-8 airplane into a flying eye hospital. Orbis International programs have helped save or restore the eyesight of millions of people by training ophthalmic professionals in the developing world and distributing medications. Orbis is one of the finest applications of an airplane ever.

Unfortunately, there remain more than 40 million people who have lost their sight needlessly and those numbers are going up at an alarming rate. Half of them are blinded by untreated cataracts. In many regions of the developing world, 60-70% of all blindness is cataract related. In addition, there are close to two hundred million who are visually impaired by cataract disease leading unfulfilled lives. This is all happening in spite of the existence of a miracle surgery called Manual Small Incision Cataract Surgery (MSICS) which takes as little as 5 minutes to perform and costs as little as \$35. With the encouragement of my son, Jim, we founded a not-for-profit organization called HelpMeSee. Its purpose is to promote MSICS and deliver a high fidelity simulator-based training system to train 30 thousand highly skilled MSICS specialists. We have assembled a wonderful team of medical, simulator engineering, instructional courseware designers, management, development, and financial experts.

I am personally committed to validating the efficacy of high fidelity simulator training of Manual Small Incision Cataract Surgery (MSICS). If we are successful as I expect we will be, for the first time millions of the poor cataract blind and visually impaired will have real hope of sight restoration.

I want to thank my friends Bill Gates and Warren Buffett for spearheading The Giving Pledge. I am proud to be in such good company with people who care so much. I particularly want to thank

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Bill Gates for his encouragement and help. We expect to work with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for a very long time. Global health is where we want to make a difference.

I have never seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul trailer. You can't take it with you. My share will be contributed to helping the least advantaged people in the world lead healthy and productive lives through medical innovation. Pick your passion and make a difference!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Albert L. Ueltschi". The signature is written in dark ink and has a fluid, connected style.

A.L. Ueltschi