

Special Edition

Memories of Linda Eldridge

AUGUST 24, 1944-JANUARY 10, 2020

Our Orange County Chapter has lost one of its true gems. Linda Eldridge passed away on Friday, January 10th, 2020. Linda was an extremely active member of our chapter and a flight instructor. This Special Edition of Plane Tales is dedicated to Linda and to those who knew and loved her. When Linda passed on, we asked our fellow 99s who knew her to write a few sentences about their memories of Linda. Those notes follow.

~Diane Myers & Amy Davis, Plane Tales Editors

In her own words, Linda expressed how she wanted to be remembered. "Although I have lived many years in California, I always felt that North Carolina was my home. I want to be remembered as a loving, caring person, grateful for loving parents, extended family and the many joys and blessings in my life, music, and flying."¹



Diane Titterington-Machado

My friendship with Linda Eldridge started in 1984 when I moved to OC, as we were both active with our chapter. One of my favorite things about our OC99s is that we are there for each other. A number of us started taking Linda to her chemo sessions about five years ago. She would be tired, but always so grateful for our assistance. We also provided groceries and funds for her. Once when I dropped her home after her drip, I insisted she tell me all the foods she liked so I could stock her shelves while she slept. Our NC gal had bacon and biscuits high on her list. Years later, when she had to go through additional treatments, her 99 sisters were again there for her. A few of us would shuttle her to and from her piano lessons,



Linda growing up in North Carolina.

¹ https://www.statesville.com/obituaries/eldridge-linda/article_434f4251-a97c-5fdf-9870-2765f9e1f278.html



Linda playing the piano at the Five Crowns restaurant in Corona Del Mar.

too. Linda would always thank me, over and over. So typical of her, and through it all, there was Linda's glorious smile. One time, when she had an unusual high amount of energy after teaching, we stopped to have a wonderful 3-hour dinner sitting outside at PF Changs. On a beautiful night, over sea bass and a glass of wine, with encouragement, Linda told me all about growing up in North Carolina (see toothless photo), going to college in Colorado, playing piano in restaurants in Colorado, then moving to Orange County and playing the piano at the Five Crowns restaurant in Corona del Mar (see photo). It was such a special night, and one of

those rare opportunities to learn more about a longtime friend that I never truly knew. I will treasure that night. Her upbeat and kind nature made Linda one of our favorite OC99s. When

I envision her face, it's always with her big, glowing smile. Linda was a woman of warm grace, kindness and patience. She would see the best in people and make everyone feel special when she greeted them—like seeing them had just made her day. By example, she helped to teach us to be better. Sweet Linda will be greatly missed and forever be remembered.



Linda in turquoise, far left in second row, DTM in blue far right top row. OC99s 1990ish.

Becky Valdez

Linda was playing the piano for the Melodrama at San Juan Capistrano's Cabrillo Theater. My grandson Ian had been cast in the play. Linda was so loving and supportive of Ian as he was dealing with his dying mother. The night before she passed away, Ian came to the theater for the evening performance, as not to let down the rest of the cast. Linda so lovingly prayed with Ian before the performance. She was truly a source of strength and support for him.

Beverly Anderson

Linda and I started working for Monte Navaro, the publisher of Flight Guide. This would be back in the early 80's right after we both obtained our pilots licenses. The Flight Guide was the best book to have for all the flying information you would need. Monte would reimburse us the rent of an airplane and we flew to all the California airports trying to sell the Flight Guide to instructors telling them they could have their name in gold on the front of the book. They were only \$5.00 each, but we didn't have much success. I guess those instructors knew GPS was coming. Linda and I had great fun and lots of laughs, like the time we called a hotel from the Reid Hillview Airport insisting they come and pick us up because the Flight Guide said they would. Well they wouldn't, so we had to get back in our airplane and fly to San Jose to get picked up and then it was a very nice limousine. We did get to meet Amelia Reid and she had one of the first Flight Guides published. We got her a new, current one with her name in gold on the front. I'll always remember those days flying with Linda.

Pat Prentiss

I met Linda in 1979 when we were both taking flying lessons at Orange County Airport. I remember how we used to laugh at our silly mistakes, nothing dangerous, just plain silly. We often used to say to each other, "What's wrong with us?" Through our love of flying we secured the proper credentials and we accomplished so much in aviation. The best part of all is we knew we weren't the best but we also knew we loved taking to the sky. The beauty of doing so was challenging and we celebrated that challenge every time we flew. It was neat to be a main character in one of Linda's skits, although our rehearsal times left a lot to be desired. These times

really pulled on Linda's patience; but, as always, Linda's warm smile and amount of patience pulled us together and I venture to say we made every skit look effortless and quite funny. The talent and wit that Linda possessed was amazing and that never went away. Linda worked very hard to instill the acting bug into us and with determination, she made it happen. I was heartbroken when Linda was diagnosed with cancer but I knew if anybody could give it a run, it would be Linda and she did. I miss my friend but I know she's finally at rest. Linda left us with beautiful memories and she knew we'd carry on as strong independent, talented women. That's the peaceful part of losing someone, you will always miss their presence but you'll always have the memory of them.

Shirley McFall

I met Linda Barker, later Eldridge, in the fall of 1989 when I started attending Chapter meetings with my instructor, Jan Peterson, who was Chairman at the time. She told me it was important to attend, even though I could not become a member until I had my Private Pilot Certificate. There were lots of accomplished women pilots to learn from. A lot was happening at the time because the Chapter was hosting the Section meeting ("Come to the Pines"). I passed my check ride in October, 1990, and joined the Chapter in December.

After many months of trying to fly and having to cancel a rental airplane again and again, I decided I needed an instrument rating. Jan and a couple of other members suggested Linda as my instructor. I did not know she was a CFII, she had never mentioned it. So, we went flying together and she accepted me as a student.

I also had no idea just how tough she could be. Behind that sweet smile was an iron spine, though a very polite one. She constantly reminded me to make 'small changes' and somehow managed to finally break me of my habit of leaning my left elbow on the armrest, causing ever so gentle unintended left turns. She rarely raised her voice and often reinforced my actions with positive comments. She was a delight to fly with. Working for and getting that rating was the hardest task I have ever accomplished. It was literally throwing out almost everything I had learned to get my PPL and starting all over again. Linda never showed any kind of stress in her voice or bearing, no matter what I did. She did, however, take along a Kleenex, which would be mangled and shredded by the end of the lesson. I could see her hands from under the hood and the sight of that Kleenex in action always amused me.

One story of a not so typical flight illustrates a lot about her. We were doing a cross country to Bakersfield and back. Linda was in the right seat as I did my walk-around. As I returned to the left seat, I ran into the extended flap. No biggie, I did that now and then. We discussed the winds and my flight plan, got our clearance, and off we went. As we crossed the San Gabriel Mountains, the winds shifted from the direction forecast and we had more of a headwind, which added close to an hour to our flight time. Young folks probably don't know of this, but Bakersfield had an NDB approach and that is why we were flying there. The winds had finally settled down and the finicky needle was centered for the approach; it was perfect. Suddenly, "my airplane" was yelled by Linda and off we went in a major right turn, then back in the opposite direction to re-start the approach. It seems that another plane flying toward us from the left had nearly flown right in front of us. We had not been instructed to follow another plane and had been cleared for the straight-in landing. My next NDB approach was definitely not perfect, but close enough for government work.

We got the 172 parked and tied down and went into the FBO. As we were walking across the lobby, headed for the restroom, a lot of people were staring at us. "Must not have seen women pilots before," I snarked. We each took a stall, business long overdue – and nothing happened. Neither of us could go; we had been 'holding it' for way too long. Peals of laughter from the stalls. I went out to wash my hands and looked in the mirror to check out the disaster of my hair. It was much worse than I could ever have expected – there was a wide ribbon of blood down my cheek and back into my hair above my ear. Apparently my 'flap rash' was a lot worse than either of us had realized.

We had a nice lunch and wondered which plane had cut us off and who had been flying it. Neither of us managed to catch a tail number. We made the requisite pit stop on the way out and all worked normally this time, to our literal relief. Clearance received, off we went on the trip home. The smog was worse this time, but I managed a most suitable ILS approach and a fairly good landing on the right at Orange County. (And yes, two Kleenexes met their end on this trip.)

Even when it was “her airplane” and I remained under the hood, Linda maintained her composure and kept us safe. Nothing was rushed and nothing was extreme, other than the turn. It was like that every time we flew. She was a marvelous instructor and I learned so much from her. I cherish the experience.

Adrienne O'Brien

Linda and I both joined the 99s in 1983. She was one of the first ladies I flew with, and I remember asking “how do you judge the distance from the runway to fly downwind?” Her answer was “a wing span”. I used that subsequently to judge the correct distance from runways at unfamiliar airports. When Linda was practicing for her Instrument check ride, I flew with her several times as safety pilot. She was amazing: so effortless and smooth entering holding patterns; all her flying was “precision”. Linda was very focused on earning her CFI rating and became a very competent instructor. I only attended one International Convention, which was in Oklahoma City; Linda and I were roommates and had a real treat checking out the 99s Museum of Women Pilots. She was such a dear friend, and I'll always hold her close in my heart.

Chris Stulik

The pictures in front of the yellow (bi-plane) probably a Navy Trainer were at JWA during a Collings Foundation Event. Linda, Shirley Tanner, and me. Great fun. In those days, Vi Smith was in charge of the event as it was the 70th Anniversary of John Wayne Airport along with Martin Aviation. She had the WWII vintage aircraft of the Collings Foundation on display. And, I think I had my Dad's WWII Jeep on display for that show! (See photo of my son and his kids driving Dad's Jeep.) Other pictures were of Pilot of the Year Banquets. Fun to see dear Letty Bassler in one of them. I can only say that Linda was always there. At most every OC 99 function. Her smile lit up the room and she always showed that southern grace and style. Her soft voice came into a conversation where she separated herself from the "noise" of the gathering. You couldn't help but listen. And, of course, it was always positive, coming from Linda. I miss her. She stayed with us once at the cabin here at Lake Tahoe. She wouldn't take my bed or my daughter Terry's. She was happy for the fold out bed in the couch! Just so gracious and giving. The once or twice I saw her "perturbed", she still smiled and laughed and made light of herself letting somebody or



Linda and me.



Linda and Shirley Tanner.



My son and grandkids driving my dad's Jeep.



Linda, Patty Murray, and me.



Linda and Letty Bassler.



Diane Myers and Linda.

something rattle her. That's wisdom. That's grace. Never let 'em see you cry kind of thing. Amazing. Do wish I could have seen her more often. She understood why and made me feel like I had a best friend in the worst of times.

Marikay Lindstrom

A very extraordinary Orange County Ninety-Nine has flown on beyond. You can pick words like “almost perfect”, beautiful, warm infectious smile, pretty hair, intelligent, giving, adventurous, classy, loving, and talented; the list of good things is endless. You can't pick one because she was all of the above and more.

Linda Barker, that was her last name in 1983 when we both joined OC99s. From the beginning our friendship was close and strong. We air raced together, we shopped, we double dated, we hung out, we travelled, were roommates, we were always there for one another through smooth and rough air. Lots of special thoughts come to me.

One particular great adventure took the two of us to Smiley Creek, Idaho, a great mountain back country airport with a good grass strip. We flew my little Cherokee, landed and set up camp, real camp as in “tent”. We were there to participate in some kind of women's seminar in hopes of enhancing our thinking, do some mountain flying and join several other female pilots, about 10 in all. Well the first thing we all did was get spirits, then set up our little tent. What we didn't realize was how very cold it could be at night in a tent in a sleeping bag on the cold Idaho ground. I can still hear Linda saying over and over, in the middle of the night, how very cold she was. We were both freezing and trying to figure out what to do and I can't remember how we warmed up. May have been the spirits, maybe we just kept all our clothes on, including shoes and jackets and anything else that might offer warmth. She was valiant. We hung in there, we challenged all the terrain and did some great “back country flying”. We made it home with tales to tell of good friends almost freezing to death in the Idaho back country. I can hold close to my heart her infectious smile when recounting this particular adventure, there were many. She was so special-- “Fly-high” my dear friend. You have left a huge hole in the hearts of all who were privileged to know you. *Love, Marikay*

Anita Vitale-Geisz

I first met Linda Eldridge at her brother Ken's wedding more than 30 years ago and my first impression was: “what a charming, soft spoken southern belle who plays the piano with her heart and soul”. And while I wasn't wrong, as our friendship developed, I learned how multi-faceted this lovely lady really was. Linda was a music aficionado, an avid aviatrix, and a generous and enthusiastic teacher to all that sought her mentorship.

As a young girl, I used to watch Sky King on television and dreamed of one day piloting the Songbird. My dream remained buried until I turned fifty and, while I shared with her my concerns that it might be too late to teach an old dog new tricks, Linda smiled mischievously and told me to just try one practice flight to see flying was for me. Smart lady, I was hooked.

Linda's guidance and support while always delivered in the most gentle fashion, kept me focused and motivated enabling me to attain my license during one of the most hectic years in my career. She introduced me to the Ninety-Nines early on and made sure to include me in many adventures from fly-ins, and parties at Patty's Big Bear cabin to just a fun day enjoying a \$100 lunch – a bargain at today's rates. Linda and I shared many memorable flying experiences. The most heartwarming was finding Mitchell Higginbotham, one of the original Tuskegee Airmen, living in Dana Point. We invited him to a couple of our parties where he regaled us with his many ventures. The scariest flight we ever shared actually occurred on the ground. Upon a return trip from Lake

Havasu, returning from the restroom, we found one of our passengers leaning against the tail casually smoking a cigarette; I never saw Linda move so fast as she extinguished his cigarette.

Linda's upbeat spirit never faded. She continued to teach music until just before Christmas and while not piloting herself, was thrilled at the prospect of a flight anywhere with the Ninety Nines. She remained the pilot in command of her life and will always have my respect and gratitude.

Bev Allen

I met Linda at one of the 99's meetings. But, I spent a lot of time with her in another part of her life, her music.

I was involved with the Costa Mesa Civic Playhouse, and I hired her to do the music for the children's plays. She also played for our Annual Yuletide Pageant. This was a gift from us to the City of Costa Mesa for lending us the theatre. And, it was free to the residents of Costa Mesa.

She played for all the rehearsals and the productions. She was very good with the children and it made it a lot of fun for everyone involved. Some of the plays we did were Bye Bye Birdie, Wizard of Oz, Annie, Oliver, and Little Shop of Horrors, to mention a few.

Linda and I also made up lots of skits for our 99s, changing the music and the words to fit our programs. She also played for fashion shows and we had fun making up our own program for each event. Every time I had a new project I gave her the basic information and she would laugh and say "Let's Do It!" Her enthusiasm was contagious. How could you help but have a good time.

I drove her to some of her doctor appointments the last few months of last year. During the time we spent there we had plenty of time to visit and we talked about the wonderful times we had flying and working on music projects over the last 45 years. We would often go to the bank, get her cat's medicine, and go to lunch on our way home if she felt good.

I think this little verse fits Linda so perfectly:

*A sincere enthusiasm not only quickens one's own spirit
and sharpens the mind, but stimulates the interest
and evokes responsive energies from all those around them.*

Linda was one of the most enthusiastic, fun-loving people I have ever met and fond memories of her will be with me forever. I miss you my friend.



Linda & Bev

Linda Eldridge and the OC Ninety-Nines

~ from Diane Myers' photo collection

