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In the June issue of American Way, Andy Egloff, a flight dispatcher at the Integrated Operations Center in Fort Worth, shared the story of the first aircraft he ever worked, where it is now and how his young son is already catching the aviation bug — all proof that birds of a feather do, in fact, stick together.



Firsts in life have a way of staying with you — your first car, first job or maybe even your first time on a plane. For me, the one that stands out is a little different — the first aircraft I ever dispatched.



I've been hooked on aviation since I was about four years old, when I made my first trip on a McDonnell Douglas DC-9. I was fascinated with that plane and its successor, the MD-80 — once a hallmark of American's fleet with more than 370 in the system. I joined American in October 1997 as a junior in high school, working as a station agent in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

Over the course of 20 years with the company, I've been fortunate to work my way to the nerve center of the airline — the Integrated Operations Center, or IOC, in Fort Worth, Texas. In my role as a dispatcher, I share a portion of the responsibility for a flight's safe operation. While the captain and first officer are at the controls, I'm focused on the flight planning logistics — things like the route, fuel load, weather and paperwork that allows the plane to take off. I also monitor a flight while it's en route, keeping the crew and our team members at the arrival airport informed of any changes that could impact a flight's schedule.

During training, I had the unique opportunity to help develop the route plan for Pope Francis' 2015 flight from PHL to Rome on one of American's Boeing 777-200 aircraft. But the very first flight I signed my name to departed on Oct. 23 of that year — flight 1062 from DFW to Kansas City. The aircraft that operated it was N488AA — you guessed it, an MD-80.

I never forgot that particular plane and followed it regularly. But the relationship was short lived. On Dec. 31, 2016, it made its final flight to Roswell, New Mexico, where it was retired from service. Strange as it sounds, it was like seeing an old friend put out to pasture. I've since traveled to Roswell to visit the plane, one of 40 MD-80s we retired last year, and I enjoy seeing the roughly 50 left in our fleet continue to do good, safe work.

While I, like many of you, may appreciate the nostalgia, the fact is, the retirements mean great news for our customers. We're taking delivery of more than one new plane per week this year — and will continue to have the youngest fleet among major U.S. carriers. By the end of 2017, the average age of our fleet will be just 10 years old — seven years older than my son, who already prefers spending the day taking pictures of planes over anything else. His favorite? The Boeing 777. Look for his story in 30 years or so.