

Elaine (Fitzgerald) Fafilek Biography



After graduating in 1961, I spent two years at the University of California, Riverside. Transferring to UC Berkeley in 1963, I encountered massive campus rallies. Bypassing the demonstrations, I graduated with a degree in Psychology. Entering graduate school at San Francisco State, I discovered that the chaos followed me. Through whiffs of tear gas and continuing student unrest, I attended classes and earned a teaching credential and a Master's degree in Counseling.

I entered a very "safe" elementary teaching career in the Bay Area in 1967; life settled down. However, that desire to explore the world could not be subdued, so I grabbed a Eurorail Pass in the summer of 1968 and headed off solo for the "continent." I tested the Iron Curtain by traveling to Berlin and crossing through Checkpoint Charlie to East Berlin. Exploring Europe for these three months was not enough, so the following summer I booked one of the first American tours into the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. That's why, standing on a busy street in Leningrad in 1969, I watched Russian TV show American astronauts imprint man's first footsteps on the Moon. This tour included stops in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. (Little did I imagine that a Czech would become my beloved husband a few years later.)



Many Kiowa classmates have met my charming husband, Al. I left the San Francisco Bay area and returned to Southern California in the early 80's when Al accepted a management job as the flour milling superintendent of the largest mill in Los Angeles. This career-changing event, prompted me to explore new options in private industry.

After a few years as an independent contractor, an administrative position with Ball Aerospace provided my transition into the aerospace industry. I migrated to McDonnell Douglas in Huntington Beach where I landed a fantastic job supporting the production team on the International Space Station. Shortly after McDonnell Douglas merged with Boeing and the major structural segments of the Space Station were completed, I joined the Materials & Process Engineering organization. My days were filled with activities supporting a dynamic group of engineers and technicians who worked material issues on many complex Boeing products: Delta rockets, the Shuttle, International Space Station, military aircraft, commercial aircraft (including the 787), Phantom Works products, and research and design projects. Exposed daily to all of this advanced technology, I now wish that I had studied to become an engineer!

With such a varied career, I was afforded many opportunities to develop leadership skills. After holding several key board positions with the Boeing Aerospace Leadership Chapter (BALC) of the National Management Association (NMA), I was elected President of the BALC in 2003. That year I was also



selected as the NMA Member of the Year. In August of 2007, I retired from Boeing; however, I still enjoy meeting at company events with current employees and retired friends.

Travel has always been a passion in my life. Al and I traveled frequently to Czechoslovakia during the 1980's to visit his family and friends. Political and social changes over the past 20 years have been startling – pre- and post-Soviet domination. Visits to California from my Czech stepson, daughter-in-law and grandson highlight many summers and holiday seasons.



Since retirement, we have become cruisers! In 2009 we enjoyed a cruise/land tour of Alaska. In 2010, we explored many countries on our cruise from Florida, through the Panama Canal, and back to Southern California. In January of 2011 we cruised from New Zealand to Australia and then took a land tour to the interior of Australia. In January of 2012, we have planned a cruise to South America.

To all State of Kiowa classmates, may you “cruise” through life with health and happiness. A toast to our many years of friendship ... Cheers!

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