

Qantas From flying Airbus to driving buses

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COVID-19 has unleashed a screaming economic crisis worldwide. Here is an incredible emotional tear-jerker story on how the pandemic had clipped the wings of two high-flying Qantas A380 pilots – Captain Peter Robert and Captain Peter Cairns, and brought them down to earth.

If the coronavirus had decimated the world economy and provides us a glimpse on how it has brought low two high status professional pilots to their knees, untold millions or even billions may have suffered worse fates without any journalists out in the field to ask: how are you doing, mate?

Does this economic impact on the personal lives of two pilots typify the sorrow and gloom of millions or billions?

Maybe it is alerting us the early rumblings of the worst catastrophe yet to come, if no effective answers to the disease is found.

But anyway, the documentary dubbed “The Project” produced by Channel 10 Australia and hosted by Lisa Wilkinson is very good quality journalism so we decided to transcribe its entirety for our readers in Sabah or maybe worldwide now that Daily Express had gone online.

The pathos of the story of the two pilots sensitively captured by the opening remarks of Lisa Wilkinson:

Lisa: These two pilots spent 62 years between them flying jetliners around the globe for Qantas but seven months ago the high flyers came down to earth in a hurry and now they are driving buses instead of airbuses.

Captain Peter Robert: It’s been part of my family and my DNA since I was born, I really miss it.

Captain Peter Cairns: I think I just have to accept that career I had is on hold.

Lisa to Cairns: You flew the last Qantas A380 back from London, how’s that?

Cairns: That was a very strange experience, and to sit there knowing that this may be the last time you ever fly this aeroplane again, it’s quite emotional really.

Robert: Bringing in the first 380 to Sydney in September 12 years ago who’s counting that was absolutely the highlight you know, I won’t sleep for days... it’s just I’m still on such a high. (Captain Robert was the pilot who delivered Qantas’ first A380 to Australia 12 years ago).

My father was a Qantas captain, he brought in the first 747 in back in 1970s something. (The 747 had the biggest 1st class lounge in the skies with 15 washrooms and separate shavers' bars). Mum was a hostess, my wife was a flight attendant as well, my sister was a flight attendant so I sort of had no option to get into aviation for my career

Lisa to Robert: So what's your relationship with Qantas at the moment?

Robert: I am stood down and as all the A380 crews, I stood down so we are sitting back and waiting for the phone to ring ...

Lisa: And the phone did ring but not to the most joyous of occasions, both Peters were asked to fly A380 into the California's Mojave Desert where the fleet has been mothballed indefinitely (stored for possible use later).

Cairns: It's a real surreal experience, you arrive at an airport that is pretty well full of derelict aeroplanes

Lisa to both: Isn't it emotional leaving the planes behind?

Robert: Yeah (sobs). I think down in my heart it was...(sob again) probably one of the most difficult things taking that aircraft that I first delivered to Australia 12 years ago and this time to Mojave, to the desert and probably stay there and won't come back, we all cried, I just turned the 380, parked in Victorville, parked on the dirt, the tumbling tumbled weeds being blown by the wind and you pan away from our 10 aircraft and there's several hundred aeroplanes.

Cairns: An old Fedex, an old United Airline aeroplane that will never fly again.

Robert: It's a very depressing place to go if you in my situation.

Cairns: Very sad, well we are hopeful that some of these aeroplanes will come back but it's not a guarantee.

Lisa to Cairns and Robert: How is the first day driving a bus going?

Cairns: Pretty good so far it's only been a day so it's not really been a week.

Robert: I like to have a purpose, I also like to learn new things and I have always enjoyed driving the end result being here at Forester Terry Hill (Sydney suburb).

Lisa: How have you found people on the road?

Robert: Some of them are really, really courteous. You put a blinker on and they'll stop and give you a bit of room, I give them a little wave and say thank you very much but there are others who need to get in front of the bus and that's their priority in life.

Lisa to Cairns and Robert: What's the difference to flying an airbus?

Cairns: Well it's just the level of concentration. It's very intense concentration flying an airbus but for shorter periods of time.

Robert: Depending on how long the flight is flying I might be able to go back to have a crew rest and maybe watch a movie or have a snooze but on my shift here with Forester Terry Hill (Sydney) the buses I am concentrating the whole time.

Cairns: In the bus, you can't concentrate even for a second and all I can do is to look down and see what time I am due the next bus stop just like that, I have scared a few gutters, yeah.

Embarking passenger to Robert: Must have been exciting to you?

Robert: Very excited. I have a new-found respect for heavy vehicle drivers around Sydney some of the quite challenging roads you have to use in Forester Terry Hill.

Lisa to Petty: You are the boss (Bus company) here how many former airline crew do you have working here?

Petty: By end of November I'll have 13. Words just spread between little groups of friends and from one to one to one to one, they are all here.

Lisa to Petty: So what's special for the long haul guys?

Petty Head: Well, it's just that they won't be back in the air for a while

Lisa to gathering of pilots: I think he's (Petty) just capitalised on you. (Laughters)

Petty: I mean I can keep them for a bit longer.

Unnamed pilot: I think we are very lucky to have what we got to have a reason to get up and go to work, provide for the family and things like that, it's great for our mental health. There's plenty of Qantas people and plenty people in the community who haven't got anything as yet.

Lisa to Robert and Cairns: So what does your family make of your switch?

Robert: Well, my junior daughter is studying in Macquarie University so she is dying to get on 197 (his bus number) out of the Ingleside so she can sit there and go with that at the front and she can drop off the bus at the uni.

Cairns: I think my wife is happy to have me out of the house. It's only so much gardening can be done and I don't like gardening. It's good I suppose in a way to set an example for your kids, you know it's somewhat about resilience. I suppose but I always thought when I retired driving a bus around with a few school kids on a run you can learn their names I think that could be very pleasant, I never thought it would come so soon. You know, I like machines, I do.

Lisa: Have you had to take a bit of pay cut?

Cairns: Oh, just a little.

Lisa: Is it tough?

Cairns: Oh look, we have readjusted our priorities and we've possibly readjusted what retirement might mean to us.

Lisa: So do you think you'll fly again?

Robert: Yep, but I have to take this opportunity and run with it.

Cairns: I am enjoying bus driving, I really enjoy bus driving, I mean if you enjoy your work you don't actually work do you?

True, I look forward to be back in an aeroplane but at the moment I'll make the most of what I have got and see.

To watch the video follow the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZewomnhhbiE>