

# Honor Bestowed

*Welcome to the CFI Hall of Fame*



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**R**ecently a wonderful honor was bestowed upon me—I was nominated to the Flight Instructor Hall of Fame.

“Hold on one minute,” you say. “I didn’t see *your* name on the list of Hall of Fame inductees!”

Oh no, don’t get me wrong, I wasn’t named to the NAFI Flight Instructor Hall of Fame, I was just nominated for it. I’m not in a class with the august instructors who were actually inducted. No way! But the honor I received was for me almost as good.

You see, anyone can nominate an instructor for induction to the Hall of Fame. Then, a specially-assigned board evaluates the nominees’ credentials to select the outstanding individuals who will actually be inducted.

Many candidates probably never know they’ve been nominated unless they are selected for the honor, but through a series of events I’ll describe, I was surprised to learn that a fine young pilot named Christopher Sis had nominated me this year.

I met Chris two years ago through an online Aviation Careers forum I hosted on AOL. Over time I’d identified him by screen name as a forum regular who routinely asked insightful questions of our guests. I and the other hosts quickly noticed his astuteness, and we assumed he was an experienced pilot because his questions and comments demonstrated knowledge and understanding beyond most other attendees.

Then one day we had a forum guest from one of the major university aviation programs, and I was surprised to see Chris asking questions about meeting the university’s entry requirements.

“Are you going back to school for

an aviation degree?” I e-mailed Chris.

“Oh no,” came the answer, “I’m a high school student. I plan to be a pilot when I grow up.”

Imagine my surprise in learning this guy I thought was a seasoned pilot was actually at that time only 15, and yet to take his first flying lesson.

When Chris did begin his flying several months later, he began writing me to describe the details of each lesson with insights and enthusiasm I had never before seen from a student. I quickly learned that this young man was not only an astute pilot and aviation buff, but also a marvelous writer. I was so impressed I offered him a “Teen Pilot” column on my web page which quickly drew a dedicated following.

Although we’ve never met in person, over time Chris and I have come to share what is, for me, a deeply meaningful instructor-student relationship. I’ve helped Chris with questions and advice regarding his flying and his future career, and he’s regaled me with wonderful accounts of his training flights through the scenic wilderness of Alaska. (How many other students circle humpbacked whales on their solo cross-country?) Through it all, Chris and I have enriched each other’s flying by swapping stories of our favorite aviation adventures, along with books, articles, and websites.

About six months ago, Chris started asking questions about my professional background, like how many flight hours I had, my ratings, where I went to school, and why I learned to fly. I hesitated to answer many of those questions, as I firmly believe there are talented pilots at every level of experience, as he himself so well demonstrates. So I downplayed the experience credentials

and emphasized instead the contributions and successes of every good pilot, whether student or instructor.

Finally Chris apparently got sick of trying to pry information out of me, so he e-mailed and said, "I didn't plan on telling you this, because I thought it would be kind of cool to have it just as a surprise. However as I'm getting further along on it, I'm finding out that I'm at a disadvantage by not having enough specific information. I'm nominating you for the Flight Instructor Hall of Fame. Please don't thank me, as it really has nothing to do with me, but rather you. Anyway, there's no way I can get all the info I want to include without going to the source."

So *that's* why he was asking all those questions about my background. I was flabbergasted. Me, in the CFI Hall of Fame? Heck, in my mind I'm just getting started at instructing! Not like Bill Kershner, or Evelyn Johnson, or Joe Vorbeck, or Dale DeRemer, or any of the other sterling individuals who've been named up 'til now.

An even bigger surprise arrived in the mail a few days afterward. It was my Hall of Fame nomination packet. In it, to my astonishment, Chris had collected more than 50 pages of my credentials, articles, website materials, and informational e-mails, along with his own articulate essay that tied it all together. Included were references to my work I had never even seen before!

But most amazing was that another person felt strongly enough about my contribution to invest all this work in nominating—*me!* Heck, I was a teenager once, and there's no way I would have put this amount of work into anything I didn't think was really, really important. What an honor, that this young man thought it was worth doing.

Chris, old buddy, I don't want to embarrass you. But I do want you to know that on the day your nomination packet arrived, I carried it into the dining room where my family was gathered for dinner. With a tear in my eye and a lump in my throat I told them that your nomination packet was the greatest flight instructor honor I had ever received, or would ever hope to. I still feel that way today, and I'm



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taking this opportunity to brag about my honor to everybody.

I really didn't expect, nor in my mind, deserve to be named to the official NAFI Flight Instructor Hall of Fame. Not anytime soon, anyway. But being in Chris Sis's hall of fame, that's good enough for me.

The truth is that Chris has probably taught me a good deal more than I've ever taught him. He's reawakened in me the joy that can be delivered in individual flying lessons themselves,

not just the fun that comes afterwards with the pilot certificate. And Chris is the kind of guy who studies his subjects so deeply that he often updates me with knowledge more current than my own.

This nomination got me thinking about lots of things. How many other pilots might I have so inspired while instructing over the past 20 years? For that matter, how many pilots does *every* successful CFI motivate and help in the course of teaching students to fly? I guess I'd never fully appreciated the impact of helping others fulfill their dreams, until a forward-thinking 16-year-old pilot helped me see the light.

Thank you, Christopher Sis, for nominating me to at least one pilot's "flight instructor hall of fame." I can tell you, old buddy, that you're already in my hall of fame, even though you don't even hold a flight instructor's certificate yet. You've reminded at least one grizzled instructor of the importance of inspiring our students with the joy, the adventure, and the romance of flying, on each and every lesson, and for the lifetime beyond. By the time you read this you should be a private pilot, hopefully having accomplished that deed on your 17th birthday. Good work!

To this year's outstanding NAFI Flight Instructor Hall of Fame inductees—Anders Christenson, Dale DeRemer, and Vern Jobst—I say "Congratulations!" You represent the successes of every one of us in spreading the word, wisdom, and joy of flight, multiplied exponentially over a lifetime of doing it "best." Thanks for standing as examples of how it should be done.

Finally, I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate every CFI reading this who has made at least one pilot's personal "flight instructor hall of fame." Our days are sometimes grueling, and the distractions many. But every time you march out to the flight line and deliver something special to your students, believe me, those folks never forget what you do for them. To each of you winning instructors I say, "Welcome, to some special pilot's 'CFI Hall Of Fame.'" I'm mighty proud to be in your company. 