

Love What You Love Podcast

Episode 48: Planespotting with Kevin Ray

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Welcome to *Love What You Love*; I'm Julie Rose. I'm insatiably curious about people and the world around us, and absolutely in love with passion and unselfconscious enthusiasm. Every other week I geek out with someone about the thing that they love, and then I share it with you.

Welcome back! Or, Welcome! Just a quick reminder that I would love your feedback on *Love What You Love* and just some information on your podcast listening habits in general. I've extended the survey through October 3rd, and as a small inducement, for every survey response, I will make a donation to the Humane Society of Silicon Valley. So check out the show notes for the link. I'm really grateful for your survey responses. Thanks for doing that.

Let's meet this week's guest. When he was a little kid, Kevin Ray absolutely loved airports and airplanes, and that passion has actually never waned. He's now a professional planespotter, putting his many years of news videography experience to work by sharing the daily activities at Los Angeles's LAX airport with fellow enthusiasts around the world.

In this chat, we talk about the queen of the skies, connecting with people over a shared passion, planespotting after 9/11, why airplanes have special paint jobs, the physical challenges of planespotting, flight crew fanboys, and so much more. So find out why Kevin loves planespotting and why you might learn to love it too.

Julie: Hey, Kevin! Thank you so much for joining me today.

Kevin: Hi Julie. Thank you so much for having me.

Julie: I'm excited to talk with you because you do planespotting and I don't know that a lot of my listeners are going to know what that is. So maybe we could start with just a definition of what in the world is planespotting?

Kevin: It basically comes down to this. If you were ever a collector of baseball cards, you're always in the search of a certain player, a certain card. When you opened up that package, you never knew what you were going to find, and basically, planespotting is kind of the same thing. You never know what you're going to see at the airport. Especially here in Los Angeles. I always say, "LAX; always full of surprises."

You can see a special delivery come in from China, you can see a high-priority aircraft that you never see before coming from Europe. Basically, planespotting is, I like to say, kind of like baseball cards. You just never know what you're going to find when you open up the package, when you show up with your camera, your video gear. It's excitement. It's not knowing. I guess that's the easiest way to visualize what planespotting is.

Julie: Sure. So, just at a super basic level, you are stationed at the airport and you're literally watching airplanes come in and take off from LAX.

Kevin: Right, so LAX is our base airport, based here in Los Angeles. LAX, super busy airport, especially during the pandemic it still was fairly busy with a lot of cargo planes coming in. So, it's a decent enough airport. I can't say that all the airports in the United States are as busy as Los Angeles. So, Los Angeles gives us a lot of traffic, and certainly on

our livestream keeps us pretty busy. So yeah, they're coming in, they're going out... Some days it's just... you gotta catch your breath there's so much action going on; you just are amazed by what you see.

We still have the 747, which is everyone's favorite. The queen of the skies. We get a lot of those here in Los Angeles, mostly cargo at this point. But it's everyone's favorite. You don't see those at a lot of airports around the country as well. Basically, Los Angeles and Anchorage, Alaska, are really the only two places you're going to see those 747s. So, that's the one thing I think people tune into, the 747. And of course the Airbus A380, which you don't see at a lot of places either.

Julie: What is the Airbus A380 and why don't you see it very often?

Kevin: A380 is the double-decker, the largest passenger plane out there. And sadly, the fate is coming to an end for it, unfortunately. A lot of airlines, certainly, right at the beginning of the pandemic, Air France in particular, had a fleet of A380s and they pulled those out of service. They retired them all just because it's so expensive to operate. It's a gas guzzler, basically. It's got four engines on it. And Lufthansa, they pulled theirs. But we still get Emirates who comes in from Dubai daily. We have a China Southern A380 that comes in from China.

And Qantas has a hangar at LAX and they base some of their A380s there, and there was one that just left the other day to Germany, and that was a sight to see. So, there's a lot that you see in Los Angeles you're just not going to see anywhere else and I think that's what makes our livestreams exciting here in Los Angeles.

Julie: When did you start planespotting? Was it recently? Were you a kid? How did it all start?

Kevin: No, I've been in the aviation and the airline world since probably five or six years old. I collected model planes as a kid, and every time we would go to the airport, which... I'm from a very small town in Michigan, and Capital City Airport was our airport back in the day. We had Detroit, we had Grand Rapids, but right smack in the middle of Michigan was Lansing, and we didn't have a lot of flights in and out of there, but enough. And it was always exciting, even as a kid. So, every time we'd go to the airport to go pick up a relative coming in from out of state, it was always an exciting time. I'd go in there, collect the timetables, and take them home...

So, I've always been into it since I was a kid, and then... I think it was, basically, in the late '90s, I was living in Phoenix and I took it upon myself to now shoot photos of planes and put them on websites called Airliners.net and JetPhotos.com, and there was a bunch of other sites. Still no YouTube at this point. Video online was just not a thing. So, you could show off your pictures online on those sites, but I think... In the back of my head I always liked video, but to show video online, it just wasn't a thing. You were kind of stuck doing the photo thing.

And I did that for a while, and we're talking about, you know, a film camera where you would have to take it to Walgreens and drop off your film, wait... Well, you could do it within an hour, basically, or 24 hours. You come back, you open up the envelope, and you're hoping that all the photos are great; you're disappointed when they come back and they're out of focus and it doesn't look as good. So, I was doing that, really into it. I had a website called KevinsAirlinePhotos, and then 9/11 happened.

Julie: Yeah, I was going to ask you about that.

Kevin: Yeah, being a planespotter right after 9/11 just wasn't a thing. If you were out there taking photographs with a camera, you were just looked upon like, "What are you doing?" So, the fun of it was just... It evaporated.

At the same time, before that happened... I will back up just a little bit. I was working for a TV station in Phoenix, and there was a company back in the early '90s called Just Planes, and what they would do is go out and shoot videos of airports and then put it on... They would edit it together, a four-hour tape, and put it on VHS, and you could purchase it online. So, there was a way to go out and show video, but obviously in the '90s, camcorders, not the greatest quality in the world. You would need, like, a professional camera.

And I was working at a TV station at the time, and I thought, "I wonder if the TV station would allow me to use the station equipment and I could start producing these videos." So we had a meeting about it. Long story short, they said no, can't do that. So that wiped that idea. [laughs] So the idea has always been there since the late '90s to do something like this.

Fast forward. After 9/11, I would kind of dabble in taking photos again, but never really seriously got into it again. But you know, if I was driving near an airport, my attention was on the planes. I never gave up the love of aviation. And it wasn't until, amazingly enough, almost three years ago that I, kind of, tapped back into it. I had this idea, and I thought, you know, "Why don't I use my knowledge of media and my love for aviation and merge those together?" And that's when I started airline videos. Basically, what I was doing was just going out and shooting 4k video of just the planes, and editing them together, and you know, putting them on Instagram, and obviously YouTube, and Facebook, and Twitter. It just took off on Instagram. It went from, like, zero followers to now it's almost 140,000 followers on that.

So yeah, it's this long... It's been going on since I was a kid, and here I am 46 years of age now and doing it as a full-time gig. Go figure.

Julie: I love that. I love that! That's awesome. So, were you interested in other kinds of transportation stuff too as a kid, or was it just always planes?

Kevin: You know, it's funny you say that because I always wanted to be a bus driver.

Julie: Ah! I love it!

Kevin: I was into buses as well. And you know, my parents were divorced, and my dad worked some odd hours, so I would have to take the public bus to school. So every morning, you know, I'd have to walk out to the bus stop. While all the other kids were taking the school bus, I had to take the public transportation. But I loved that because I love buses. It was always, like, the highlight of my day taking the bus to school and taking the bus back home.

And I always had a dream to drive those buses. It's still a dream, I will say that. I would still like to. I would certainly like to still drive some of those buses that, you know, I rode on back in the day. They're probably sitting in a graveyard somewhere. But yeah, it's interesting you say that. My love for buses as well, believe it or not. But it was never as great as for airliners. Airliners was always my big thing.

Julie: Do you enjoy flying, or did you ever want to be a pilot?

Kevin: No, I never wanted to be a pilot. Go figure; I wanted to be a bus driver but never wanted to be a pilot. But as a kid, believe it or not, I had a fear of flying. And I had... Yeah, still to this day I get a little nervous flying, but I think that's just normal.

Julie: Sure, because you're a rational human being. [laughs]

Kevin: Exactly. But you know, I think after an hour in the air you're fine. So, I think it really comes down to this: I think it's the hustle and bustle of trying to get to the airport on time and going through security. Just dealing with all of those just kind of gets you nervous because you're just trying to make everything on time. You don't want to miss your plane.

Julie: So you just need a private plane. You can just drive up to it and then you're done. You're set.

Kevin: Exactly. And you know, there's a lot of companies out there now that are figuring that out and offering that service as well.

Julie: I keep coming back to this, but what is it about the planes? Is it the fact that they can fly? Is it the sound? The noise? What is it about it?

Kevin: That's a great question. I don't know. It's... I could be driving down the street... and I live right next to LAX now. I could be driving to the grocery store, and I'll be sitting there at the light, and I'm hearing, you know, a 777 coming. It's got a very unique sound to it, and... I mean, it doesn't matter if it's a 777. It could be a small plane, it doesn't matter, it still gets my attention. And I just sit there and I stare at the marvel of the thing. It's a great question. I don't know if it's the sound and the beauty of it, and just the size of it. I'm sure it's just... It's everything, all of the above.

Julie: There's the collecting aspect, but then there's a vicarious, like, "Oh my god, that plane just came in from Dubai. That's so cool!"

Kevin: Yeah, I don't know if where it came from... The big thing about planespotting is certainly the different liveries, the paint jobs on the plane. When you asked about planespotting, that's a big deal to planespotters. These airlines are getting smart and they are painting a lot more of their planes in special liveries to... you know, if it's advertisements for a movie, or a lot of these airline companies are celebrating birthdays; anywhere from 50 years to 100 years, whatever it may be. They'll put, like... Emirates, with their big Airbus A380s, are now putting this huge 50-year logo on the side of them. That's something that just happened in the last week.

We haven't yet seen that plane here in LAX, but you better believe, when that pops up on the radar that the Emirates A380 with the big 50th anniversary title is on there, you're going to have a ton of planespotters out there trying to take video and photos of it because it's just something that hasn't come to LAX yet. People want to be the first to get out there and capture it to put it online to get the views and whatnot. So, it's the special liveries, really when it comes down to it, I think that's the hot thing with the planespotters right now. It's not really about where it's coming from.

Certainly the types of planes... There's a lot of types of planes. The 747 passenger plane... British Airways, they pulled all their 747s right when the pandemic happened, so you're never going to see one of those again. Lufthansa, they fly a 747-8 from Frankfurt, and that's the only passenger 747 daily at LAX right now. So that's a hot thing to get as well because in the back of your mind you're like, "How long is that

going to be around for?" So you might as well get as much video and photos of it as you can.

Julie: Do you have a sense of when planespotting became a thing? Has it been a thing since we've had planes, or is it more on an '80s, '90s thing?

Kevin: That's an interesting question. I think you've always had these guys... And I see them, and I still to this day can't figure out exactly what they're doing with it... But there are certain guys, and these are the older generation guys, that are out there with their tablets and they're writing down the registration numbers of each plane. Now, what they do with that, I have no idea. I would assume that it just goes into a box somewhere and that's it.

And then obviously you had... When I talk about when I started shooting planes on a film camera, there was a lot more work with that. There wasn't as many planespotters back in the day. And then once cameras became digital, you know, it was much easier to see the instant results, and I think that opened up the door to the younger planespotters. So, that's a lot of things you see now, those young teenagers out there with their huge camera lenses and their digital cameras. They take the photo and instantly they're looking in the back of the camera to see if they got the shot. It's just something you wouldn't have seen 20 years ago. So, I think with technology being the way it is, I think that's kind of opened up the door to another generation.

So, I think it runs... I think it's always been around. I think it just keeps on evolving. Video is becoming a big thing online as well. Instagram just recently announced that they're no longer going to be considered a photo app. They want to gear more toward video now. So, you've got a lot of still photo planespotters that are like, "Oh, now I gotta start shooting video!" So now it's just progressed to another level. It just keeps on changing. I think we go from the guys that write down the registration numbers to now the people out there shooting video. And obviously, what I'm doing with the livestream, that's basically a TV show with commentary.

There's a few around the world that do it. There's one very successful guy in London, BigJet.tv. And then there's a few others, but honestly there's not very many. But I'm sure there's more to come.

Julie: Yeah, sure. So maybe you can explain the anatomy of one of your livestreams for folks. What happens and how does it work?

Kevin: So, let's take... Tomorrow is a Sunday. It's considered one of our big shows. So, I'll wake up at four o'clock in the morning, I'll do some pre-work. There's a lot of graphic elements that we throw in the show. We give shout-outs to our highest paid members, so that constantly changes. There could be a new member that pops up overnight; there could be someone that decides to move on, so I have to update those graphics. We also have a thing called Jet Tip Alerts, and that information comes in overnight. So we have a lot of graphic work that goes into the show that I have to do before the show starts. So, getting up at 4am sounds early, but there's never enough time to get everything done.

So I'm out the door by 6:30, rushing over there to the hill, setting all the equipment up. We've got an audioboard, a computer, we've got the camera, you name it. We've got, like, five huge batteries that just power us because we're on the air anywhere from 10-12 hours on a Sunday, constantly, nonstop.

And the biggest question always is: Kevin, where do you use the restroom? And I always say, after 25 years of being a news photographer, especially during the pandemic when you couldn't even go inside and use the restroom at McDonald's, you kind of learn how to adjust your water intake during the course of the day. But that's the ultimate question. "How do you do this for 12 hours without taking a break?" And I'll tell you, the time just flies by. It's amazing. And that just shows me that I love what I'm doing. It's not work. It's just the joy of being out there and broadcasting to the world. And you know, 12 hours just flies by just like that.

Julie: Now, is this something you do full time now?

Kevin: I just recently went full time.

Julie: Right on!

Kevin: After 25+ years, I think it could've been 26, I just last week I went full time. Full time with the channel.

Julie: Congratulations! Wow.

Kevin: I left the TV news industry. And speaking of... And I was just talking to someone about this. There's a lot of interesting things going on in the world right now, I'll leave it at that, and you know, there's a lot of things to make people uncomfortable, a lot of anxiety in the world with a lot of news going on. I'm fully aware of that. And the one thing that was always weird to me is, you know, doing the livestream brings so much pleasure, and joy, and comfort to so many people around the world. So I would be doing that one day, and then I would go do my news job and I would feel like I'm bringing so much negativity into people's lives. It was such an imbalance. It was the most bizarre feeling.

So I said to myself, "At some point, I've got to counterbalance this. I've got to go in one direction or the other because it's so lopsided at this point." And believe it or not, this livestream has really taken off and made the ability to have enough income coming in to be able to do it full time. That's the amazing thing. So now, instead of bringing the bad news to people, into the world, I'm bringing the joy, and pleasure, and comfort of just livestreaming. Simple as that.

I get emails all the time of people saying, you know, "I can't thank you enough." People email and say, "My husband died of cancer a few years ago and now this is my happy place. You bring happiness." Emails about memories of fathers bringing their sons out for planespotting back in the day. It just... It's amazing. The feedback I'm getting, it touches my heart. I would've never imagined that I would be at this point in my life. So, it's a good thing.

Julie: It's a good thing to love what you love, right? [laughs]

Kevin: Yes! Absolutely! Go figure.

Julie: [laughs] That's awesome. So, you're located at LAX. Do you have another airport that you would love to spot at someday that's, kind of like, a dream airport? Or is LAX kind of it?

Kevin: Well, as I said, LAX has basically everything you could ever want right now. Me saying that, still one of the biggest requests in the chat is, "Kevin, are you ever going to stream at another airport?" I'm always like, "Yes!" In a couple weeks, we're driving up to San Francisco and we're going to do one outside of SFO.

But we did one in Phoenix, Phoenix Sky Harbor back in July, and it didn't go over very well because it was 112° and we were broadcasting on top of a parking garage. And I think we got about five hours out of it. By the fifth hour, the computer completely just said, "I've had enough," and quit on me. On top of that... I mean, all the equipment was just having a hard time. It was struggling. So, we'll be back to Phoenix... I always tell everybody, "We'll be back," because I do like Phoenix. It was a great airport, something different, but we've got to wait until it cools off. So yeah, I've reached out to some of the other local airports here in Los Angeles. Some are going to work with us. Some are not.

Julie: So do you have to get approval ahead of time?

Kevin: No, technically you don't. If you're in a public area... I have reached out to LAX. LAX is very supportive about what we do. I've talked with them, they're one of our biggest viewers, they absolutely love it. Their problem is, if I was to be on their property, the private property element of it, I would need a permit and those permits get very expensive. So, that's just not going to be an option. And I totally understand it. If they give me a little leeway, then they have to give everybody else the leeway, and that could just be a big deal.

So, I understand where they're coming from. I think we have the understanding that they're supportive of what I do and there's enough spots around the airport to get enough decent shots that it's fine. And the same thing with Phoenix. Phoenix was very welcoming to us as well. They said, "You can shoot on top of the parking garage up there. Just don't melt up there. And have a great time." So, yeah... They're all pretty much supportive.

Julie: And have you ever, kind of, gotten roused by the police or, like, airport security?

Kevin: [laughs] Yes. Just a few weeks ago I went to a different spot... And this is a spot where I had shot video from in the last two years, and it's a little bit different. Before, it was just a little camera and a tripod. This time, it's the camera, the tripod, the computer, the audioboard, and all these big battery packs and whatever.

Well, there's a road that travels right in front of that. And if you're kind of looking off to the side you're kind of like, "What is this guy doing up on the hill with a camera? It's kind of interesting." So I guess someone called the cops on me. So, 11 minutes into the broadcast, the police show up. And you know, they get out and I said hello. I think they... Because I wear the shirt, so on the front it will say 'Planespotter' and on the back I have my Airline Videos logo so that people can see who I am. So, the cops got out, saw who I was, and said, "Okay, we understand what you're doing. It's not a big deal. Just understand that when someone calls the cops we have to come and check it out."

I said, "Oh, I'm totally aware of that," and they went on their way and everything was fine. So, it does happen. It doesn't happen very often. There's certain places... Where we're broadcasting from on our big show on Sunday is Imperial Hill, which is in El Segundo. But that place is known for planespotters, so you kind of fit in with everyone else. That spot where the cops were called, it's basically me standing on a hill all by myself under a tree. It looks a little different. So, I totally get that somebody driving by might be like, "What's going on over there?" So, yeah.

Julie: Now, have you ever seen... Either at LAX or just in general, have you ever seen anything, like, an emergency landing?

Kevin: There will be go-arounds. That's pretty much the extent of what I've seen.

Julie: What is a go-around? What does that mean?

Kevin: So basically, a plane is coming in for a landing, and either there's an issue, the pilot's not ready to land, or there might be another plane on the runway and the space is just not... it's too close. So, for whatever reason, the control tower might say, "You've got to go around," or the pilots will call it out. So what they'll do is they're coming in and they'll say, "Okay, we're going to go around." So they'll go full power on the engines and just kind of roar back up into the sky, and then make a circle, and come back around and do that. You see that pretty often at LAX. Sometimes you never figure out why, what was the cause of that.

There was one time... And this would've been about two years ago. It was a very rare moment, and I was there in El Segundo at Imperial Hill, which is the southern part of LAX, kind of looking directly over the airport. I was there shooting video all day, and this was not a livestream so I'm just collecting 4k video. At one point it said, "All right, it's 11:30, I think I'm going to go use the restroom down the street." So I packed everything up, I went down to go use the restroom. Ten minutes later I start getting a text from someone saying, "Did you hear? Did you hear what happened?" I said, "No, what happened?" They said a Philippines 777 just took off and their engine, basically, burst into flames taking off. I said, "Are you kidding me?!" [laughs]

So you know, I'm instantly going online, and I'm seeing cell phone video taken of this. And basically, it happened right in the position I was just in. Needless to say... They landed; it was a rough landing as well. They came in kind of rough and blew out all the tires, so that would've been a shot as well. But thankfully, everything was fine. Everybody was safe. But what a shot that would've been. And needless to say, I think I was kind of depressed that I had missed that for about a good six months, because... You want to talk about an opportunity to get your name out there, certainly as you're just starting, and that was a missed opportunity. So, that was something that took a while to get over.

Julie: And so you're never allowed to drink anything ever again, is what you're...

Kevin: Yeah, exactly. [laughs] Now you know why I'm there for 12 hours and never leaving. That was a very rare thing, but it does happen. But for it to happen again in that same location, it may never happen again. Thankfully. You know, we don't want any stuff like that happening, for sure.

Julie: Now, do you try to "collect" different plane types or airlines? Is there, like, a plane or an airline livery, for example, that's like your holy grail?

Kevin: I have to say, one of the favorite liveries out there is the All Nippon Airways, which is ANA. They have a 777-300ER, which is a really long plane. It's got a paint scheme of BB-8 from *Star Wars*. It's basically the *Star Wars* BB-8. So, they've painted it to look like the droid, and it's just the most amazing livery out there. And that's not the only one they have. They also have a Dreamliner - same company, ANA. They have a Dreamliner in the R2-D2 livery as well. And they have a 777, a smaller version of the 777 that we don't see, unfortunately, at LAX, of C-3PO.

So, anytime those planes are coming into LAX, you've got to make sure you're out there getting footage of it. I would say that's probably the top of the list, and there's some retro liveries out there that are really cool looking as well. That's kind of a thing

in the airline industry in the last ten years, having a retro paint job from back in the '60s, or the '50s, '70s, or '80s. Those are always one of the "gets" as well.

Julie: How do you find out about, like, new liveries that you want to be on the lookout for?

Kevin: This is where Twitter is amazing. There's so many aviation geeks out there and I follow a lot of them. It just takes one person to secretly take a photo... That's how it usually happens. Somebody works in the airline industry and they see it being painted before the airline actually announces it. They sneak a photo of it and they get it online, and then all of a sudden everybody's talking about it, sharing, and retweeting, and whatever. So, that eventually ends up on my wall feed on Twitter.

Obviously, a lot of the airlines do it secretly and they get away with nobody secretly taking photos of them, and then they have a big announcement. Basically, I don't think anybody got a photo of that Emirates A380 and that 50th anniversary so Emirates was able to launch a campaign on that and announce it.

Julie: Back in the early 2000s, New Zealand Air had special *Lord of the Rings* livery. Is that kind of the beginning of having special livery?

Kevin: Oh, no. This goes back, probably... Hmm. I mean, technically Braniff, back in the day... That's an airline that was in the '70s and '80s. I mean, they had 727s that were just colored differently. I think that was kind of the start of having not just one single paint job. You had a purple plane, and a brown plane, and a blue plane, and a red plane.

And then Southwest, they had their Shamu planes, the whales, and they have all their state flag planes. They've had those for quite a long time. And America West, you know, used to be a carrier out of Phoenix. They merged with US Air, then US Air became American. Back in the day, America West, they had their flag liveries as well. They had a Phoenix Suns plane. It's been going on for quite a long time. And I really think the airlines are starting to catch on. They're like, "This is good advertising."

So, a lot of these airlines... There's some airlines out of Mexico, like VivaAerobús and a few others, that will advertise a lot of movies. Amazon Air had a... Because they're Amazon, they were advertising their *Coming 2 America* movie, which was on Amazon Prime. So, they were using the ability to advertise one of their movies on their own planes. So, the sky's the limit for it. And certainly Alaska Airlines, they seem to be coming out with a special livery almost every single month.

It's a special thing. And I think, certainly with more planespotters and more attention, certainly in these livestreams that I'm doing, it's a benefit for these airlines to do this because they certainly stand out. Let's say there's a regular American A321 in the silver livery, which is very basic for them, and then you had an Alaska special livery coming in after that. Which one are you going to focus in on? You're going to wait for that special livery, and you're going to post that special livery as opposed to the American typical paint job. So, I think it's a smart move on the airlines. It obviously costs a little bit more money, but you know, I think in the end it does help them.

Julie: Is there a carrier that you have never seen at LAX that you are just dying to see fly in there?

Kevin: Air India used to fly into LAX, and from what I was told, when Emirates came in it kind of put a stop to Air India. So that's the number one. Where is Air India?

There's a few. Like Thai Airways that used to fly into LAX. Always loved their livery. They don't fly into LAX anymore. You'd be surprised. There's a lot of airliners that fly into Chicago or New York that don't come to LA. And then vice versa, there's a lot of planes that you don't see in New York and Chicago that only come to LAX, like Fiji Airways and Air Tahiti. We certainly have the Qantas base here as well, so you're going to see a lot of Qantas Dreamliners and A380s. They're not flying at the moment, passenger service, but they are flying back and forth for cargo. But you know, you're just not going to see that in Chicago or New York at this point.

Julie: Now, do you have any interest in doing military planespotting, or are you strictly commercial?

Kevin: Funny you say that because I've been getting a lot of questions about that. "Kevin, are you going to show airshows or military bases?" And my answer to that always is no. [laughs] Because if you look at the name "Airline Videos," I always say, I think we're going to stick with the airline industry. Anybody can go out there and show the airshows and the military, but I think I just want to stick to the one thing and be known for the airline coverage and not just everything under the sun, I guess.

Julie: Besides the 747, what's your favorite plane?

Kevin: I always say this... Right now, currently, it's the Airbus A350. It's such a gorgeous plane. No matter what angle you look at it... Certainly, if you look at it straight on, it just... They call it the raccoon because of the windows on it. It just kind of reminds people of how a raccoon looks with their eyes. It just... It looks like a serious machine. I don't know how to describe it. It's just perfect. It's just designed perfectly. It's just such a good-looking plane.

And then, you know, you have a version of a 900, which is a smaller version. And then you have the 1000, which is a longer version, which we get plenty of. We get Qatar Airways coming in from Doha. And we get Virgin Atlantic; they fly the Airbus A350-1000s. So, we get plenty of those.

You know, that's the current plane I love, but my love will always be for the older planes, the Boeing 727 and the 737-200, which was, you know, a small baby version of the 737. Those were the planes that I flew on as a kid and, you know, those were just solid beasts, as they would say. They just were one of a kind and, sadly, you don't see them around anymore.

But I think, you know, currently it's Airbus A350. I also like the Airbus A220, which is a brand-new aircraft. It's a very small plane. It's the only plane that has a window in the lavatory in the back of the plane. So, when you're in there just doing your hair or whatever, you can kind of slide the window open and take a look outside. You won't find that in any other airplane out there, so that's unique to it.

Julie: I love that. So, you're out there 10, 12 hours a day, multiple days per week. Have you ever been in contact with any of the crews of the planes that you're filming?

Kevin: Oh yeah, I get emails all the time from pilots saying, "Hey, can you catch my flight? I'm leaving at this time," or, "I'm arriving here." Just emails saying, "Hey, we're all watching. Just so you know, all the pilots are watching you." We did, a few weeks ago, I think one of its kind, I don't think it's ever been done before. Captain Chris, who is a captain for Virgin Atlantic, he was flying a plane from London, one of the A350-1000s. I've been wanting him on the show for the longest time and he's just a busy person. And I got

up at 4am on that Sunday and he had texted me on Instagram and said, "Hey..." The flight had changed. He said, "I'm flying into LAX later this evening." I said, "Oh, great." He said, "Do you want to do an Instagram live?" I said, "No, I don't want to do an Instagram live. I want you live on the show!" He goes, "Okay."

So I sent him the link to the show. Basically, what I do is, I can send links to people, and all they do is they click on the link on their cell phone, it instantly brings them into the backstage of my show. That's brand-new technology. It's amazing. So basically, when he landed, we got his arrival live on the air. I said, "There's Captain Chris. He's landing on 2-5 left..." And he made his way around the airport to the gate, and I told everybody, "Stand by. Captain Chris is going to be joining us live from inside the cockpit momentarily."

And lo and behold, I'm sitting there waiting, waiting, waiting... And very nervous because I've never done this before, and he pops up. And we take him live from inside the cockpit, talking to him live. It was amazing and everybody loved it. They just could not believe it. Still to this day, that's the most talked-about thing. They're like, "Oh, we can't wait for more pilots to do that," or, "We can't wait for another Captain Chris live from inside of his Airbus." So yeah, he showed us around the cockpit; he showed us around inside the first-class area of the plane. He's a busy man and he just flew for so many hours, you know. He was tired. So we couldn't spend too much time with him.

But he said that, you know, if he has more time, like a 48-hour layover, he wants to join me there at the hill and do commentary with me as well. But he's coming back Tuesday, so hopefully we can have him on the show once again. So yeah, I think... There's a big audience when it comes to the pilot world.

Julie: What's the worst part of planespotting?

Kevin: Of course, you know, not being able to use the restroom. The weather conditions... For the most part, it's been not extremely hot this summer here in Los Angeles, at least around LAX. It's been hovering around, you know, low 70s to mid-70s. During some times of the course of the day, it's a little hot. The sun's kind of beating down on you a little bit. I've got umbrellas, and I've got sunscreen, and you know, you do the best you can. But sometimes it's just... The weather can just be a little too much. And you know, the wind picking up.

But it certainly beats 112° in Phoenix and it certainly beats trying to do this at -30° in Chicago or New York this coming winter. I always say, my biggest audience will be this winter when it's 75, 80° here in Los Angeles and it's -30° in Chicago. People are going to be tuning in trying to, like, soak in the sun virtually through the TV set.

Julie: To kind of wrap up, if someone who's listening wants to try planespotting, how would you suggest that they get started?

Kevin: That's a good question. I get asked that a lot, and it's usually a lot of younger planespotters trying to figure out, "How do I even get into this?" And obviously, you know, you need a camera. You don't need a very expensive camera. You need a decent lens, a lens that's going to zoom in because, obviously, you're far enough from the runways that you've got to zoom in. I think that's it. And you know, just get out there and just do it as much as you can, as much practice as you can because you're only going to get better.

I always look at... I've been a news photographer, a videographer for most of my life. You look at the videos that I did maybe two years ago when I first started doing this. They're horrible compared to what I'm doing now, even on top of the experience that I had. So I always say... you know, it doesn't matter what level you're at to begin with; you're always going to improve and get better with time. You just gotta keep on doing it.

And sadly, I think a lot of people get discouraged and they, kind of, move on because they just feel like maybe their photos or videos are just not the quality that they see online and they give up on it. But I say, stick with it and just move forward with it because you just never know, you know?

Julie: Yeah. And if someone was just, kind of, interested in planes and maybe they just want to learn more about the liveries, somebody who doesn't want to do it necessarily as a hobby but just wants to learn more about it, what would you suggest?

Kevin: I would suggest that they watch our live feed, [laughs] because you're going to learn a lot. You're going to see a lot, in the comfort of your own home as well. I always say, a lot of the planespotters don't even bother coming out to the airport anymore, because why? You can sit in the comfort of your sofa, watch it on your big screen, and you can see everything that you would normally see anyway. And then, you know, with the commentary, and we try to bring people on that can answer questions. I always call on my executive producer, Brad Ward, who works for an airline. I had him on last Sunday and he was answering questions all day long.

Because, you know, I always call myself the Vanna White of commentary. I'm going to give the basic information to you. I'm going to say, "Here's so-and-so flight. This is what the plane is. This is where it's going. The flight number," blah blah blah, "It's landing on this runway." But you know, I can't go into the full technical areas so much because there's so much going on. So, it was good to have Brad come on, who knows everything there is about aviation, to answer those questions. And I think once in a while we're going to have him back on to give a little bit more meat to the livestream, because I think people like that.

Julie: Awesome. Well, Kevin, thank you so much for taking so much time to chat and letting us know about planespotting and your passion. This has been so interesting.

Kevin: Absolutely. Thank you so much, Julie. You've got the exclusive! This is my first podcast.

Julie: Oh hey! Yay! Awesome. I'm glad it was us. Thank you.

[clip from "Jet Airliner" by Steve Miller Band]

You can find Kevin at his website, AirlineVideos.com and on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#) as [@AirlineVideos](#). I'll include links to everything in the show notes, of course, and I'll also include a link to his favorite nonprofit and my favorite nonprofits too. Huge thanks to Kevin for sharing his passion with us.

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out to her at Emily@TheWordary.com. The music for *Love What You Love* is called "Inspiring Hope" by Pink-Sounds. A link to that artist is included in the show notes.

As always, thank you so, so much for listening. Let's hang out again soon.

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