

# One Last Look

## Drone Video Company Offers Hospice Patients a Glimpse Into Loved Locations of Their Past

By Karen Aho



A video still from a church where one of Aerial Anthropology's customers got married 57 years prior.

liked the idea of a live-stream flight.

"They said their No. 1 request from patients is, 'Can someone drive me down my street,'" Davis says. "They realized this is how they could grant that wish and provide people with some of that release."

Following two successful trial flights, the hospice nonprofit dedicated a grant to begin funding flights as a free service to its patients. It has also teamed with Davis to promote campaigns encouraging corporations and individuals to sponsor flights. Aerial Anthropology charges \$125 per experience, which covers a 20- to 22-minute live drone video and an edited five-minute souvenir film.

For the moment, films are limited to the local area, although Davis plans to expand and coordinate with a network of pilots. Davis drives to the location chosen by the patient, opens the DJI GO app, and selects the option to stream the drone's video to a YouTube Live Events page. Back in the room, a family member with a laptop clicks on an emailed link to view the live stream. "What they're seeing is through the lens of the drone," Davis says. Patient and pilot talk by phone.

One elderly woman suffering from emphysema asked him to fly over a lake, 30 miles south, where her family summered. Watching with family, she directed him to fly over a dock, then to a hill where she recalled sledding in winter.

An old man with Alzheimer's asked Davis to fly over his former company and neighborhood along a lake, pointing out to family members throughout retaining wall, docks and other structures he'd helped build. When Davis cast the drone over downtown, the man asked him to fly over the church where he had married and his children had attended school.

"The driver of this thing is the real-time view," Davis says. "It's a live feed at the place that is meaningful to them."

The life of a man, according to one quote, moves in four stages — world, village, garden, bed.

The quote aches with truth. But what if we could rise from that last bed, at least virtually, to take one final flight? What if, as in a dream, we could choose where to go, while we're flying, and soar over our favorite haunts? Start with the old neighborhood, say. Then, wait, go west to the swimming hole. There's the cliff. Swoop over that. Did I ever tell you about my first jump?

This is the vision of Tom Davis, whose company, Aerial Anthropology, provides real-time drone videos to people who are dying.

Davis launched the patient outreach program this spring in Cleveland, where he lives, with the support of a hospice center. He is now working to expand the program to other cities.

"If I could do this full time, and we could still pay for the house, make the money I am now, that's the dream," says Davis, who holds a full-time job as a solutions engineer for a software company. "But if someone stole this idea and provided millions of hospice patients this experience, I'd be OK. ... You'd be doing good things."

Davis, 34, has been moved by the response his live feeds have received from patients and their families at the Hospice of the Western Reserve,

where he conducted pilot flights.

"Priceless," said one man's daughters, who sat by his side as he described a video flight over his former neighborhood, job site and church. "There is nothing we wouldn't have paid for that experience."

Another woman wanted to fly over the lake where generations of her family spent summers.

"When the staff asked what they could do for her" later, Davis recalled, the woman said, "Could you give me millions of dollars to give to this company so they can continue doing this?"

Davis, a father of three, bought "an old beat-up" Phantom DJI in 2013 on eBay for \$500 after stumbling upon

drone footage on YouTube.

"I don't know how I came across it, and I couldn't believe what I was seeing," he says. "I completely fell in love with it and started taking it everywhere."

He took the safety courses, earned the pilot's license, bought two more DJIs — a Phantom 3 Professional and an Inspire 1 — then got an FAA Section 333 exemption for commercial operations, advertising services for realty, construction and film projects. What he really wanted to do, though, was tell a story about how drones could do good by people. The news had been full of mishaps, full of privacy fears. "Everyone was seeing

the negative side of it," he says.

Then he learned that a friend's daughter was sick. The 6-year-old girl's immune system was so compromised that she couldn't leave the house.

"The idea was, I can take this drone and do a live feed — go to the park, the beach, so she can do these things," Davis says.

That flight didn't take off — the girl's health improved. But Davis now had an idea. What about people who won't recover?

"What can we do to take them out of the confinement of their room and let them feel free for a little bit?" he says.

The first hospice center to respond to Davis' pitch, Western Reserve,

To see Aerial Anthropology's submission to the 2016 Bay Area Drone Film Festival, scan this QR code with your smart device.

