



Clarion Review ★★★★★

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

## Life with a View: Memoir of an Air Traffic Controller

**Robin A. Smith**

iUniverse (Aug 12, 2017)

Softcover \$13.99 (244pp)

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*Smith describes a very technical field in a way that clearly conveys its high stakes.*

Robin A Smith's memoir, *Life with a View*, reflects on a career in air traffic control, including concentrations on maintenance, development, and instruction for controller equipment.

This work is a retrospective, considering what makes a good air traffic controller, reminiscing about hijinks in the tower, and encompassing events like a widespread air traffic control strike that tested loyalties. But the book also deals in personal stories, with Smith considering what proved particular friends to be true companions and highlighting his lifelong role models.

The book begins with the start of Smith's career. At times, the book's progression is quick, moving through years; some events are more closely narrated, including experiences of harrowing near misses in the sky and a turbulent storm that left everyone flying blind.

The text is thoroughly detailed. Lax attitudes in unbusy airports are juxtaposed with the grueling work of busy towers. The use of air traffic control slang, like "scraping paint" as code for plane-to-plane contact, makes the vocation feel more vivid.

Smith describes a very technical field in a way that clearly conveys its high stakes, if without precisely detailing its settings or instrumentation. Recurring players are the best developed, especially those who become valuable parts of the narrator's life, though Smith himself remains the most fleshed out. Bit players are harder to distinguish, with various controllers described as rebellious, independent, and mischievous.

Sections at the end of each chapter bring isolated incidents and their impacts into greater relief. They also encompass personal details, such as how much contact was maintained with particular friends later in life.

A section devoted to the air traffic controllers' wives includes summary statements about why relationships worked or didn't; such glances provide clues into the workers' time beyond their jobs. Still, the focus of the narration is on the job itself, and the featured wives are not thoroughly developed.

Without a clear picture of its prospective audience, or an obvious aim outside of its remembrance, the book gathers accounts of both good and hard times within a singular, occasionally misunderstood, career. The inclusion of major mistakes and missteps adds depth, emphasizing the reality, and dangers, of air traffic controllers who are overly confident.

Air traffic control workers within the book are shown to accept the consequences of their actions. Action sequences in the radar room or the tower are the most attention-grabbing scenes in the book, and they, along with the strike, initiate the reader into the concerns of the job.

*Life with a View* gives a dynamic insider's view of professions in air traffic control.

LAURA LEAVITT (December 21, 2017)

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