

# A LIFETIME JOURNEY OF LEARNING TO FLY



**RUSS ERB  
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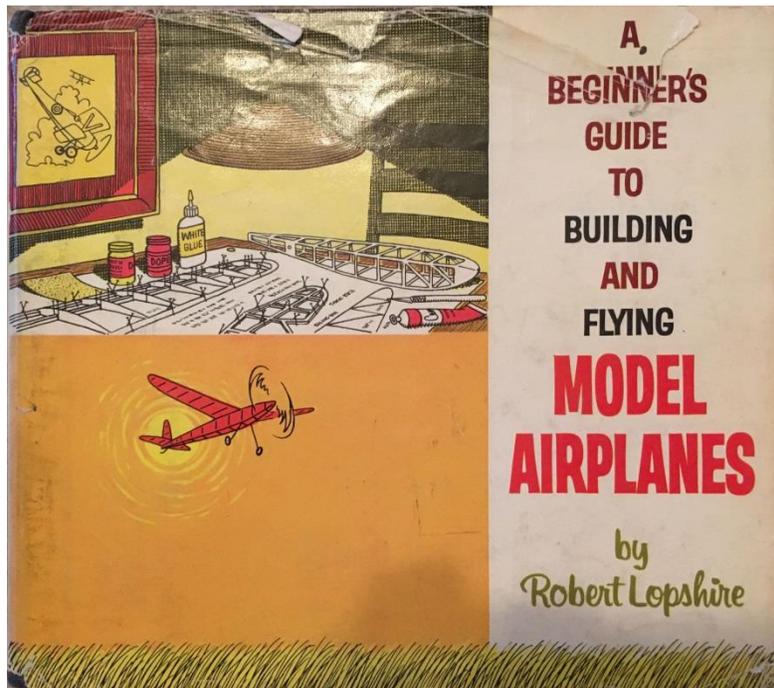


## Beginnings

For as long as I can remember, I have enjoyed airplanes. Many other boys were into cars, but I thought planes were far more interesting. After all, Snoopy flew a plane, even if it did look like a dog house. One of my earliest memories was a T-shirt with some sort of jet airliner (the latest thing) on it. When I finally comprehended what was on the T-shirt, I was very disappointed that it was too small for me to wear anymore.

When I could, I would fly balsa gliders and rubber band powered Rise Off Ground (ROG) models that could be purchased at the “Dime Store” for a few cents. I do remember once I was jealous that my father was teaching my brother how to build a Taylorcraft kit. I don’t know how interested my brother was, and I’m pretty sure he never finished it. I was told that I was too young to handle a knife, and my time would come when I was older.

Sometime during Elementary School I finally asked Dad to show me how to build model airplanes. He bought me a Guillows Cessna 150 balsa and tissue kit and got me started on building it. I was very excited that the wing had an actual airfoil instead of just being a flat plate. I had been reading books about airplanes and had already learned about airfoils. I also found a book in the library that was very helpful in understanding how to build models. I liked it so much that my parents went to the book store and ordered me my own copy. That was when I learned that you could order books that weren’t in the book store. Now we have Amazon.com.



**Figure 1. The (actual) book that my parents bought for me**

I built several balsa and tissue models, including a Sopwith Camel like Snoopy flies, but I never seemed to stay focused, so they took a long time to build.



**Figure 2. 1971 Christmas card photo of my brother and me holding the Sopwith Camel with Snoopy on it**

Over the years I “graduated” to engine powered U-Control (control line) models. I didn’t even consider radio controlled models, as the transmitter box alone cost over \$500. For reference, that was about the size of my Dad’s paycheck for one week, and thus was completely out of the question. I built several control line models through the years, and even flew one or two of them, but not very much. I think my Dad used every excuse he could find to not take me somewhere that I could fly them. He was usually concerned that it was too windy. I didn’t know enough to question him, so I just continued to be disappointed about not getting to fly my models.

Years later I would realize that what I really wanted to do was to get in an airplane and fly it myself. Since a kid doesn't have anything approaching a budget to do that, I just built models as the next best thing.

### **I Was A “Young Eagle” Before There Was A Young Eagles Program**

EAA began the Young Eagles program in 1992 as a way to encourage pilots to take kids flying and hopefully encourage them to become pilots.

On my twelfth birthday in August 1973, without explanation my parents told me to get into the car. We proceeded to drive to the Grand Prairie Municipal Airport (F67, now KGPM). There we met Tom Hamblet, who my Dad knew either through work or through Boy Scouts. Mr. Hamblet had rented a 1972 Cessna 172M Skyhawk, registration number N20018. At one year old, this Skyhawk was essentially new. (This airplane still exists today, flying for Curtis Eads Flight School on Suffolk Executive Airport (KSFQ) in Suffolk VA. <http://www.curtiseads.com/aircraft/cessna-172m-n20018/>) I was loaded in the left seat, and we taxied out for takeoff.

Initially we flew over the town, and Mr. Hamblet encouraged me to find my house. I found something I recognized, and then followed the roads to where the house should be. I found it, but was surprised that I could barely see it through the trees. It turns out that most of Arlington TX is covered in trees higher than the houses. The result is that from the air it looks more like a forest than a town. Turns out this is still true today.

We headed back south, and he encouraged me to handle the controls. I did so very intently. I couldn't see much outside as I was a little short for a pilot, so I was probably mostly looking at the instruments. He said to me “You're flying!” and I looked at him to find his hands in his lap. I didn't know what to do at this point, so I tried pulling on the yoke a little to climb a little.

One thing I learned on this flight that was very unexpected was that turning an airplane was very different than turning a car. To turn a car, you turn the steering wheel some amount and hold it there until you want to drive straight again. In the airplane, you only turn the “wheel” until you get to the bank angle you want, and then you return it to the center. When you are done turning, you turn the “wheel” the other way to level the wings again. This was the only thing of the flight that surprised me.

We returned to the field to land. We taxied back to the ramp and shut down. My cousins Jimmy and Johnny Cobb, who were visiting from Tennessee, climbed in the back seat, and we took off for another flight. I don't remember any of the details of that flight.



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**Figure 3. A 12 year old me ready to go flying**



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**Figure 4. Me with my instructor Tom Hamblet**



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**Figure 5. Taxiing out in Skyhawk N20018**



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**Figure 6. Taxiing to the runway**



**Figure 7. A happy new Young Eagle, 19 years before the program was created**



**Figure 8. Tom loading Jimmy and Johnny Cobb in the back seat**

After this flight, I decided that I wanted to have a Skyhawk of my own when I grew up. I'm still a fan of the Skyhawk, even though it is slower than the Bearhawk. Strangely, I ended up not doing my primary flight training in a Skyhawk. In fact, I have very few hours in Skyhawks, and I have never flown one without another qualified pilot on board. In essence, I have yet to "solo" a Skyhawk. If I ever do proceed on to get a Flight Instructor certificate with Airplane rating, I may finally get checked out in a Skyhawk as part of the TPS Airmanship program.

### **How Do I Become A Pilot?**

So at some point I remember tossing out all of the jobs I thought would be fun to do when I grew up, such as a bulldozer driver (still haven't done that one), and decided that I wanted to be a pilot when I grew up. I read all the books I could find about flying and studied all that I could. Yes, there were forays into space travel (Apollo was in progress at the time), submarines, ships, and dinosaurs, but it always seemed to come back to airplanes.

Around the eighth grade, I asked my parents what I needed to do to become a pilot. Being a savvy pair, they only told me one option. Join the Air Force and let them teach you to be a pilot. Gullible as I was, I believed them. They went on to say that the best way to ensure that I got to pilot training in the Air Force was to attend the Air Force Academy (at the time, this was essentially true). At my parents' encouragement, in the eighth grade I wrote to the Air Force Academy requesting information on how to apply and what classes I should take to maximize my probability of getting in. It turns out that this was the perfect time to find that out, as I had time to arrange my High School schedule. If I had waited much longer, it would have been too late.

Besides the obvious four years of English, maths like Trigonometry and Calculus, and sciences like Chemistry, Biology, and Physics, the Academy also highly recommended a typing class. This seemed odd, since I didn't want to be a secretary. I took typing class in my sophomore year, and the class was very much aimed at making a secretary out of me. Even though I hated much of the class, I now count it as one of the most important and useful classes I ever took. The Academy just wanted me to be able to type my own papers in college. With the rise of computers and the type of career I eventually ended up in, it has been an absolutely critical skill. I would have been forced to learn to type eventually, and it was better to do it in a structured program.

Many years later, I would learn that it was possible to become a pilot by attending such schools as Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Spartan School of Aeronautics, or even the University of North Dakota. When I confronted my father about why he didn't tell me about those options, he simply said "But those were expensive!" It is clear that he knew about them and chose not to bring them

up. I didn't realize in the eighth grade that those schools would require money that my parents didn't have.

So I did all of the application process, and in the process of filling out a zillion forms managed to memorize my Social Security number. I did get selected by my congressman, even if there were some political strategies behind it. Even so, I kept plunging along on my quest to become a pilot. This, in spite of the fact that in the back of my mind I was pretty sure that my eyesight was bad enough to disqualify me from pilot training. For some reason I chose to just ignore this inconvenient truth and plunge on anyway.

On 25 June 1979, as I was inprocessing to the Academy, an optometrist looked at my eyes and told me straight up that I was not Pilot Qualified, and if that was the sole reason that I was there, then I could just stop right there and leave. I thought about it for maybe a second, and decided "I'm already here, I might as well stay." Yes, a major decision that would secure the complete future course of my life was made with less thought than deciding what to have for lunch. I think it seemed easier to just continue what I had started than to completely abandon it and have to start all over to figure out a new path. As it is, my other option would probably have been to go to Texas A&M and join the Corps of Cadets, which would be very much like the Academy, only noticeably worse. I didn't know about the other schools, student loans, and debt to haunt you for decades to come.

As it is, I don't regret it. I didn't enjoy much of it, but I don't regret it. I got an excellent education at no cost to me or my parents. That led to a full scholarship for grad school (when I did go to Texas A&M in a much better situation) at no cost to me. This would eventually lead to attending USAF Test Pilot School (TPS), which turned out to be my calling. Had I left the Academy that first day, I might have ended up as an airline pilot, bored and hating the lack of challenge in the job.

### **Initial Attempts At Becoming A Pilot**

After my freshman year was over in 1980, I learned that I could take flying lessons at the USAF Academy Aero Club. Not only were the prices significantly lower than other flight schools, but cadets were also able to take advantage of the "Cadet Welfare Fund" that further reduced the cost per hour to learn to fly.

I signed up, and was assigned to Paul Holosniczenko as my instructor. We would be flying in the mighty T-41 (a former military Cessna Skyhawk). I wasn't very impressed with him as an instructor. He was very procedural, and taught everything as a procedure. I was required to have a notebook where I would record the step by step procedure for anything, such as climbing, descending, entering a turn, or doing a stall. Nothing was ever said about feeling the airplane or exercising judgement. Everything was a step by step procedure.

The worst offense, which I have always remembered, was on lesson 1 he said that in a turn, you have to pull back on the yoke because in a turn “the airplane gets heavier”. Now I had spent years studying flying academically and I understood load factor, lift components, and all that stuff. I still get offended thinking about it and how he assumed I knew nothing.

After three flights and a grand total of 3.8 hours of instruction I decided to quit. Not because of my instructor, but because the airfield was 8 miles from my dorm room, and as a sophomore I wasn’t allowed to have a car. This made it extremely difficult to get to the airfield reliably on a schedule. In hindsight, it was a good decision. Even so, it left me with the feeling that getting a Private Pilot License was too expensive to be attainable. This kept me from even considering it for the next eleven years. That idea I only slightly regret.

One bright spot was that during the fall of my senior year (1982) I finally got selected for the soaring program. In November 1982 I started glider flight training in the mighty Schweizer SGS 2-33. In five fly days I accumulated 11 sorties and 2.8 hours of flight time. At the end of the day on 3 December 1982 there was just enough time left for my instructor to sign me off for my first solo flight ever. Just before takeoff, he remembered to think about weight and balance. He asked me how much I weighed. “145 pounds” (those were the days!). The placard said the minimum solo weight was 140 pounds, so he didn’t bother to go get ballast. Big mistake. The stick trim position on tow was about 1/2 inch from the down elevator stop and at the full extent of my arm. I got it back down safely and we put the glider away. I was told that I could come back on the next fly day and take one more solo. Of the remaining three fly days that semester, all of them were cancelled for weather. I never did get my second solo. (Now with over 4000 glider sorties in my logbook, I guess I should probably get over that.)

### **Test Pilot School Reignites The Flame**

Much like my “Young Eagles” flight, my first flight of Test Pilot School was in a T-38 with Lt Col Russ Stewart on my 28th birthday in August 1989. While exciting, it was nothing even remotely like the airplane I had wanted to own for myself someday.

Eleven days later I went flying again with Lt Col Russ Stewart, but this time in the UV-18 Twin Otter. It was a twin turboprop and much bigger than a Skyhawk, but at least it was closer than a T-38. My initial task was to climb to altitude while holding 100 knots indicated airspeed (KIAS). I couldn’t see anything out of the window, but I thought I did a reasonably good job holding 100 knots. At the top of the climb, Lt Col Stewart said I did pretty good, except I had turned over 90 degrees to the left. I didn’t believe him until he said “Remember how the sun was in your eyes initially and then went away?” Yep, I needed to learn about “more right rudder.” Even so, during this climb I thought “This is fun. I can do

this. I need to look in to restarting my flight training.” That’s where it all restarted. Of course, I knew that there was no point in even thinking about starting until after I had graduated TPS.

I was talking about this with my classmate Harry Whiting who had his own 1955 Cessna 180. We talked about flying, and the first convenient date was 14 October 1989. This happened to be my wife’s birthday, and we hatched the idea of taking her flying for her birthday. This would be her first flight in a small airplane. When we got to the California City Airport, Harry noticed that his airplane was not where he had left it. He asked the FBO personnel why they moved it. They said that a few days ago it was parked right next to the restaurant, and since the restaurant was on fire, they figured he would prefer that they move it. Faced with that reasoning, Harry agreed. Even though it was her birthday, my wife was gracious enough to let me sit up front. I don’t remember much about that flight other than I flew a 30 degree banked turn reasonably well and Harry made a landing in a very significant crosswind with the stall warning horn blaring.

At some time later in the year, Harry invited me to go with him on a cross country flight to Kingman AZ (KIGM) so he could check out a paint shop that he was going to have repaint his airplane. After talking to the paint shop, we were trying to figure out how to get some lunch. Harry asked the line boy if there was a courtesy car available. The line boy said that we could just take his car. Harry was somewhat surprised that someone would just hand their car keys over to a stranger (I just knew I had no idea what was going on). When asked, the line boy said “I have your airplane here. I know you’ll bring my crappy car back.” Couldn’t argue with that logic! As it was, we then found out there was a restaurant on the field, so we just walked over there. On the way back, I must have been flying okay, because at one point Harry decided to crawl to the back of the airplane to check something out, leaving me alone up front with no autopilot to do the flying!

After TPS was complete, I investigated flight training at the Edwards Aero Club, Aronsons’s Air Service at Rosamond Skypark, and Barnes Aviation at Fox Field. The prices weren’t significantly different. The Aero Club may have been less, but being in the Aero Club brings a lot of military overhead that was just better avoided. I remember thinking that the airplanes at Rosamond looked a little better than the others. Of course, I would later learn that the quality of the paint job means almost nothing.

After TPS my wife had secured a job teaching at a local elementary school. Though it would only last for one year, it certainly helped with the finances of learning to fly.

I don’t remember how it happened, but at some point I must have mentioned being interested in taking flying lessons to someone at the Lancaster United Methodist Church Choir. They said that I needed to talk to Martha Minnicks in

the alto section, because her husband was a flight instructor. I talked to her and found out that her husband Paul was a flight instructor at Rosamond, and also was a Chief Master Sergeant at Edwards. I figured anyone that highly placed had to be a good man. He would retire from the Air Force about halfway through my training program.

One Sunday Martha told me that Paul was at the airport working at the FBO and suggested that we go talk to him about getting started. My wife and I had wanted to try the Golden Cantina restaurant at the Rosamond Skypark, so we had lunch there and then proceeded over to the FBO to look for Paul. We found him on the back side of the FBO hangar and he was expecting us. We talked briefly and decided we should get started. He showed me how to schedule flights, and I settled on a general schedule of Monday 1700, Wednesday 1700, and Saturday 0900.

Three lessons a week was a nice plan, but it almost never happened that way. By that plan, of 92 expected opportunities to fly, I would only fly 47 times during this program, for a scheduling efficiency of about 50 per cent. Eight opportunities were lost to participating in the Appalachia Service Project with the church youth group, and the remainder were lost to either weather or other scheduling conflicts. As required, a few flights were made on non-standard days.

### **The Flight Training Starts**

On 6 March 1991, Paul and I set off in Piper Tomahawk (Traumahawk?) N2566B, the airplane we would do most of our training in, for a 0.7 hour lesson of air work in the practice area. This was a rather short lesson—after considering about 20 minutes for ground operations, 5 minutes to get to the practice area and 5 minutes more to get back to the airport, that means that we spent all of about 12 minutes doing maneuvers. The biggest learning point I remember was that as large as airports are, they can be incredibly difficult to see from the air. I learned to find the airport by counting the line of lumps: Lump 1 was Willow Springs Raceway. Lump 2 was the Tropico gold mine. Lump 3 had the water tank on it. Lump 4 was across the highway on Edwards AFB. Rosamond Skypark was between Lumps 2 and 3.

Apparently I did pretty good on that flight, because on the second lesson we never left the traffic pattern. Around the pattern, touch and go, lather, rinse, repeat. Over and over again. Of lessons 2 through 8, all but one were around and around the pattern, learning to do landings, with a brief foray into stalls. On lesson 9, after three patterns, Paul must have decided he had had enough. He told me to pull off the taxiway so he could get out. He then told me to take it once around the pattern for a normal landing. Hence I was released for my first ever powered solo with no warning and no chance to mentally prepare for it. I just pretended that Paul was still sitting next to me being really quiet. After landing and tying down the airplane, Paul took a picture of me in my green sweat pants.



For lesson 7, 1 April 1991, I was directed to plan a dual cross country flight to Hesperia. I did it all just like I was taught in ground school. It was all very exciting, in spite of the fact that I had never heard of Hesperia. To qualify for training, a cross country flight must be longer than 50 nautical miles. Rosamond to Hesperia is 53 nautical miles in a straight line. A common joke around southern California is that 50 nautical mile cross country flights are almost a joke, since once you take off you can see 50 miles. While true, you can't see the AIRPORT from 50 miles away. In fact, just as I learned in lesson 1, airports were still very difficult to pick out of the surrounding terrain. I also learned that day that some of the cross country planning as taught was completely bogus, particularly the part where you calculate the wind drift correction angle. It turns out that this value is never correct, because the winds are never exactly what they were forecast to be. Instead I learned that you just guess at how much correction you need and adjust it as required to follow the desired course. We made a full stop landing, taxied back, and took off to return to Rosamond.

I remember noticing that the runway at Hesperia was not aligned with the prevailing winds. If anything, it was perpendicular to the prevailing winds. The runway direction seemed to be determined by local topography, as the runway is parallel to the railroad tracks. Not only that, but the runway was downwind and about 20-30 feet below the railroad tracks, which made for some exciting turbulence in the landing flare.

Early on I had been reading in one of the Flight Training magazines an article about go-arounds, and the importance of not trying to save a bad approach. It said that you should always be spring loaded to abandon the approach and go around. I told Paul about it, but he seemed strangely unimpressed. He seemed to think that you should constantly strive to make the perfect approach so you wouldn't have to worry about going around. We went out to beat up the pattern again, and on the first approach I wasn't happy with how it was going, so I did a go-around. Feeling I had learned something, I said something like "See what I mean?". Again, Paul was unimpressed, probably thinking that I could have easily landed from that approach. His response was simply "I think you just wanted to go around." That was probably the last time I did an unplanned go-around during my training program. This story seems funny to me now, having made over 4000 glider flights, all ending in acceptable landings, and none with even the opportunity to go-around.

Initially Paul and I used the (cheap) headsets that were provided by Aronson's. The quality wasn't very good, but at least it was slightly better than the handheld microphone and speaker in the ceiling. I had dealt with that setup on those three flights at the Academy Aero Club, and I never could understand anything out of that speaker. Of course, to hear the speaker meant you couldn't use hearing protection, which meant learning to fly came with the bonus feature of going deaf. Fumbling with the handheld mike was awkward as well. The cheap FBO headsets may not have been much for hearing protection, but at least they were more convenient and slightly more intelligible.

I had used David Clark headsets during TPS, and remembered them to be much better. I went down to Aircraft Spruce in Fullerton (when it was still in Fullerton) and selected two nice passive David Clark headsets to buy. They were nowhere near as nice as today's Bose A20 Active Noise Reduction headsets, but they were a huge improvement over the FBO headsets. I bought two figuring I would eventually need a second one when the wife would go flying with me. In the meantime, I offered it to Paul, and he was very excited to be able to use a better headset. Thinking back, it does make me wonder why Paul never just bought a better headset for himself. Maybe he grew up in the era of the speaker in the ceiling, or even no radio at all, such that it wasn't as much of a "must have" item for him as it was for me.

I didn't care for the Flight Manual checklist as provided by Piper. The preflight inspection checklist was in some wacky order that didn't flow as I went around the airplane. I was constantly back tracking. Being used to checklist usage in Air Force airplanes, I had a pretty good idea of how checklists should work. I took the Flight Manual checklist and rearranged all of the same steps into an order that made sense to me. I figured that since all of the steps were there, it should still be valid. I printed it up and put it in an Air Force checklist binder. I showed it to Paul, and he was so impressed he asked me to make one for him. I did, and gave it to him at the next lesson.

During that first month of training, we cancelled at least five times for excessive winds, especially on the afternoon flights. It was March after all. On one evening as we met by the outside wind gauge display, I was looking at the numbers and expecting another cancellation for high winds. With frustration in his voice, Paul said “Well, if you’re going to fly in the Antelope Valley, ya gotta learn to fly in wind.” I’m pretty sure that is an exact quote. We did fly that evening, and it wasn’t that bad. I have thought about that incident many times over the years on windy days, but I’m not quite so quick to just ignore the winds and go. It was easier to get away with flying a tricycle gear airplane. Now that I fly a taildragger, just getting to the runway can be a challenge. If it is hard to get to the runway, it’s probably not a good day to go flying. My current flight instructor, Gary Aldrich, who flies a Cessna 180 taildragger, has confirmed that with me multiple times since. The lesson—don’t be afraid of the wind, but give it due respect.

At the end of one lesson, Paul wanted to impress upon me just how short a short landing could be. He demonstrated his best short field landing technique, followed by stomping on the brakes. He stomped on the brakes so hard that he locked up the right main gear. I could feel that something felt different and not quite right. Left a nice skid mark on the runway. After parking, I saw that he had left a major flat spot on the tire. The tire was trashed. Bill Aronson was not amused. Paul sort of achieved his goal—he impressed on me that it was a bad idea to lock up the brakes.

Paul had taught me to climb straight out until reaching pattern altitude (800 feet AGL). He claimed that this would give me more time on downwind so that the pattern ops would not be rushed. Apparently other people had other ideas, such as turning crosswind at 500 feet AGL. This made the pattern quicker, which was fine for experienced pilots. One day we were flying and so was George Prewitt, the local Designated Pilot Examiner. Apparently he expected us to turn at 500 feet AGL, which we didn’t. This led to some sort of traffic conflict that George wasn’t expecting. After landing, there was a rather tense “discussion” between Paul and George about what we were doing, and I was just trying to stay in the shadows to avoid getting hit by any Paul shrapnel. Eventually the situation was resolved, even though in the end I think both Paul and George still thought the other was wrong.

Numerous times during our ground training Paul asked me something like “You have the book, right?” I always answered “Yes” because I thought he was referring to the book that King Schools sent me along with my video tape ground school course. This went on for several sessions until one time something didn’t seem right. I pulled out my “book” and he said that wasn’t what he was talking about. Finally he showed me the FAA’s “Pilot’s Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge”. In all of my studying I had never seen nor heard of such a thing. I never bought one, since by this point we were so close to being done it didn’t

seem like it would be of any help. Now they're available online for free download.

For the first month and a half of training, all of our flying was done from Rosamond Skypark, which has no control tower. Eventually we would need to go to a towered field, and the closest one was Fox Field, only 8 nautical miles away. However, Paul refused to take me there for the first time on a Saturday morning. At that time on Saturdays there were constantly about three or four aircraft in the pattern at any time, and Paul didn't want me to be overwhelmed on my first time. Therefore, we made our first trip to Fox on Monday 22 April 1991, when the traffic was much less.

Another issue that Paul warned me about was that the runway at Fox was 150 feet wide, while the runway at Rosamond was only 50 feet wide. He warned me that I would need to get used to a new sight picture, but encouraged me to always land on centerline, regardless of the width of the runway. As he told me, "If you always land on centerline, then it doesn't matter how wide the runway is." I have thought about that many times, especially when landing at Mountain Valley (L94) (runway 36 feet wide), Harris Ranch (30 feet wide), or landing gliders on a 12 feet wide paved strip. As a result, I've never had trouble with skinny runways. For that matter, I've never had trouble with wide runways either.

Oddly enough, about a month later, the Fox runway was closed for repairs, and they designated Taxiway A as a temporary runway. I wasn't concerned, but I remember Paul telling me "Don't worry about it. It's the same width as the Rosamond runway."

By 11 May 1991, I had completed three supervised solos, so Paul directed me to plan a solo flight over the west end of Antelope Valley. I was directed to be sure I had a good time. Clearly the point of this day was motivation. Even so, I still spent some time tracking the Lake Hughes VOR because I felt like I needed to be "doing something". I flew for a whole 1.1 hours. After that flight, Paul told me to get back to work!

On 10 June 1991 we took a dual cross country up the mountains to Inyokern (KIYK). All I remember was that there were three large runways for a relatively "abandoned" airport.

On 1 July 1991 we took a dual cross country to Bakersfield Meadows (KBFL). This was different than the previous cross countries, because before there was just flat land between the airports. Now we had to go over the Tehachapi mountains to get there, even though it isn't that far away. We took off and I slowly climbed all the way to 6500 feet MSL to clear the mountains and fly over Tehachapi. At 6500 feet MSL, we had 6000 feet to descend to land at Bakersfield. While we were over the Tehachapi loop, still nowhere near getting out of the mountains, Paul told me to start a 500 foot per minute descent. I thought he was nuts. We

weren't even halfway there, and I certainly couldn't see the airport. My gut feel was that if I did as he said, we would get down to pattern altitude and still have to fly another 10 to 20 minutes to get to the airport. Of course, I didn't say any of this, because my higher thought processes told me that he's been doing this a lot longer than I have and probably knows what he is talking about. Having complete faith in my instructor, I did as he said. I was quite surprised that we got down just in time to make a straight in approach. I learned about descent planning that day.

On the return leg, we took off and headed for the pass. I climbed and climbed in what felt like the longest climb I had ever made in the modestly powered Tomahawk. I finally got to altitude as we entered the mountain pass. Of course, we almost immediately started descending to get back to Rosamond.

One day as we were making yet more approaches and landings at Rosamond, Paul clearly wanted to impress upon me the idea that "You don't HAVE to land at Rosamond". If the clouds or especially winds were bad and I didn't feel that I could safely land at Rosamond, then I should divert to somewhere else. Fox is close by with a wider runway and free of obstructions, and Mohave has six runway directions to choose from if the wind is really squirrely. He went on to say that I should never be concerned about how I would get home. If I had no other option, all I had to do was give him a call and he would come pick me up. I would eventually learn that he made this offer to all of his students.

On 20 July 1991 I flew my first solo cross country, which was a whole 53 nautical miles. I was surprised to find Paul at the Rosamond Skypark when I first got there. I didn't realize that he was required to review my planning and write a seemingly excessively long endorsement in my logbook for every solo cross country that I flew.

For 24 July 1991, Paul said that we were going to do spins. Flying fully developed spins was not required by the regulations, but he felt it was important that I see the whole spin. Since we had an airplane that was certified for spinning, why not? I wasn't concerned, since I had flown eight to ten five turn spins in the A-37 during TPS in all sorts of wild and wonderful variations. I had also flown spins in a glider during TPS. For all of these, I had flown the entry, the spin, and the recovery. We climbed to a high altitude, and Paul demonstrated a three turn spin to the right. I was surprised that the Tomahawk spun much more nose low than the A-37, which made the spin more of a rolling motion than a yawing motion. Paul said to me "Okay, now you do it to the left." I did a three turn spin to the left with a perfect recovery. As soon as we were recovered, Paul said "That's enough. Let's go home." With one landing to a full stop, we logged a whole 0.5 hours. Shortest instructional sortie of the entire program.

The next Saturday, 27 July 1991, was a solo cross country to Porterville (KPTV). Coming out of the valley from Tehachapi, my intuition felt that I should turn

about 30 degrees to the right of the heading that my planning said I should fly. I followed the planned heading, even though it felt wrong. At the appropriate time the airport appeared right in front of me. I stopped, tied down, and had lunch at the café. This was the first time I had ever flown somewhere and got out to do something. Eating is a favorite activity of pilots at any airport where it is available.

One evening in August we met late to do some night flying. This is tough, because sunset is so late in August. The plan was to take off around sunset and keep flying patterns as it gradually got darker. It was late enough that we were the only ones at the airport. I started preflighting and found that the tail light was out. Not a big surprise, since we mostly flew during the day, no one would notice that the bulb was burnt out. Paul said it was no problem. As a certificated mechanic, he grabbed some tools and removed (“canned” as in “cannibalized”) a bulb from the other airplane and installed it. During the preflight I found another problem (the nature of which I don’t recall) which Paul quickly corrected. Usually I didn’t have any problems during the preflight inspection, so I was a little on edge.

While we were taxiing out, I was thinking about all of those Air Force safety meetings I had attended where they talked about the accident chain, and how if someone had recognized the chain and stopped it the accident would not have occurred. I wondered if I was in the middle of an accident chain. For the takeoff, Paul was looking out the right window, as by now he had enough confidence that I knew what I was doing, so he didn’t need to monitor the takeoff. I pushed the power up and we started accelerating. At the point that I would normally look at the airspeed indicator and see 20 to 30 knots, I looked at it and it was straight up at zero. Immediately thinking that I couldn’t be seeing that (denial), I looked at it again. Still at zero. No, that can’t be right. Looked at it again, and it was still at zero. Now I realized that I had a serious problem! Time to abort the takeoff! While we had never specifically discussed how to abort the takeoff, I had heard T-38 pilots enough times quoting their boldface

- 1. Throttle(s) - Idle**
- 2. Wheel Brakes – As Required**

I smartly pulled the throttle to idle and got on the brakes. Of course, this unusual action got Paul’s attention, and he whipped around to see, saying “What? What?” I pointed at the airspeed indicator, still stuck at zero, as I continued braking. I taxied back to parking and shut down. Of course, Paul said that he could fix the problem and we could still go. Since I had never had a maintenance problem before, and now I had just had three in a row, plus the fact that we were going to be flying at night, I decided that it was time to break the accident chain and go home. I cancelled the lesson, and have never regretted that decision.

At the next lesson, Paul told me that the next morning they blew out the Pitot line and a big old bug clog came flying out.

On 28 August 1991 we tried simulated instrument flight under the hood. I must have done pretty well. Well enough that Paul seemed both pleased and annoyed that I picked it up so fast. He explained it as the “young people” of my generation (boy, that was a while ago!) took to instrument flight so quickly because it was so similar to those video games we all spend our time playing. I couldn’t seem to convince him that I didn’t play video games because I wasn’t any good at them.

The next attempt at night flying on 30 August went smoothly without any of the drama of the previous attempt.

On 7 September 1991 it was time for my long solo cross country. The requirement was to fly to two other airports with at least one leg longer than 150 nautical miles. However, I still needed several more solo hours than that flight would require. I figured I would just knock out my long cross country requirements and fly my solo hours at the same time. I set up a flight to Nut Tree (KVCB, then O45), which was 278 nautical miles from Rosamond, which was still easily within the range of the Tomahawk. My boss had told me that they had a train that would take you from the airport to the local tourist stop. For the other airport, I chose Columbia (O22), which itself is 217 nautical miles from Rosamond.

After Paul had reviewed my planning, I set out on my grand adventure. On this flight I succumbed to several classic mistakes and managed to recover from them. Since the GPS constellation was still being built, navigation was by single VOR, dead reckoning, and looking out the window. I saw a lake that I convinced myself was a particular lake on my chart. Later I would realize that I was looking at the wrong lake, and the wrong lake was about a tenth the size of the actual lake when I found it.

I landed at Nut Tree and refueled the airplane (another first!). I took the train, as promised, to the tourist stop. I remember eating in what had all of the appearances of a high brow restaurant (with prices to match), but I wasn’t impressed at all with the quality of the food. After lunch, I went upstairs to a store that had a full size Ryan STA airplane hanging from the ceiling. I don’t remember if I even bought anything, but I remember that airplane hanging from the ceiling. Don’t go looking for this place, as it was torn down many years ago and replaced with another tourist stop. The train to the airport was also decommissioned and removed.

I took off and flew to Columbia. Again, I convinced myself that I was near the airport, and that it was this isolated dirt strip I was looking at. Not even close. I kept going and found the airport nestled in the mountains. I was surprised by the S-2 Tracker Fire Bombers that were landing downwind and taking off upwind. I

understand now why they would do that, but at the time I had never heard of any airport operations other than takeoffs and landings into the wind.

After refueling, the flight back to Rosamond was uneventful. The three legs were 3.5 hours, 1.3 hours, and 2.4 hours, for a total of 7.2 hours. I got the hours I needed, but I was exhausted.

Our second night flight was on 11 September 1991. For this one we did an abbreviated cross country, all the way to Mojave (KMHV). I remember flying a pattern to the “normal” runway, but I kept making radio calls for Runway 22 (which does exist at Mojave). Paul said nothing, because I suspect he didn’t catch the mistake. When on final for the runway that I intended to land on, the landing light lit up the threshold with a big “26” on it. Quickly I squeezed off a radio call that I was doing a touch and go on Runway 26.

### **The Practical Test**

On 14 September 1991 we officially did a Practical Test (checkride) prep flight. Paul told me to contact George Prewitt and set up the Practical Test. I called him and we set the date for 3 October 1991. He told me what his fee would be, and at first I thought it was rather high. However, I took that fee and divided it by the number of hours we expected the Practical Test to take, and came up with an hourly rate very close to what I had been paying Paul. At that point I decided it was reasonable.

The week of the Practical Test, I was full on to prepare for success. On Monday, 30 September 1991, I flew solo and made five landings on Runway 25. On Tuesday, 1 October 1991, I had my last dual lesson with Paul, also on Runway 25. On Wednesday, 2 October 1991, I arrived at the airport to find the winds were blowing backwards, favoring Runway 7. I flew solo again, making four landings on Runway 7. I figured this was fortunate, as now I had recently practiced on both runways, so I would be set either way.

I showed up early at the airport on Thursday, 3 October 1991, ready for my date with destiny. Sure enough, the winds still favored Runway 7. I was glad I had flown that last practice.

The ground evaluation went well and pretty much exactly as I had expected. As part of the evaluation I was asked to plan a cross country flight to some airport to the east; specifically which one is lost to memory.

My first flying task was to takeoff on Runway 7 (I don’t remember what type of takeoff), fly around the pattern, and make a normal touch and go on Runway 7. As I touched down, the tires barely squeaked as they came up to speed. I wanted to call the tower to ask them if we were on the ground, but there was no tower at Rosamond. Talk about the perfect time to make a great landing! I have always

assumed that at that moment George decided I had passed the Practical Test and that the remainder of the 2.0 hour flight was just to check off the required boxes. The rest of the flight seemed very low threat.

The next task of the Practical Test was to set out on the cross country flight that I had planned, at least the first part of it. Once I was established in cruise flight, George asked me when I would arrive at the next checkpoint. I figured I was supposed to somehow figure out what our ground speed was (not sure how I would do that since GPS wasn't a thing yet) and then calculate when I would arrive at the next checkpoint. For reasons I couldn't explain then and still can't explain now, I just looked at my flight card and read off the arrival time that I had planned long before we got in the airplane. To my surprise, he accepted that as a valid answer and we moved on. Thinking about this 28 years hence, I'm thinking that the variation caused by the wind not being exactly what was forecast would only change the answer by a minute or two, and George knew that. My answer must have been "close enough".

We flew some other maneuvers, did some simulated instruments under the hood, and finished with a total of 3 landings and 2.0 hours. Of course, Paul was pleased to hear the results, though probably not surprised.

### **First Passenger**

The big question that you have to answer after successfully passing your Practical Test is "Who will be your first passenger?"

For me, that answer was fairly easy. My wife had been patiently waiting to go flying, and after all, she had pretty much paid for it. On Saturday, 5 October 1991, we flew for 1.3 hours to fly over the Tehachapi Loop and make one landing at Fox Field.

On 14 October 1991 I took her flying again for her birthday. This was just two years after Harry had taken her flying the first time. This time we went to Big Bear (L35). Big Bear was a high altitude airport (elevation 6752 feet), but I didn't see what all the fuss was about. After all, I had been there during TPS in the mighty DeHavilland U-6 Beaver and we didn't have any problems. (Maybe that's because the Beaver's engine has a supercharger that allows it to make takeoff power even at high elevation airports!) In any case, I did my due diligence. I looked at the charts and determined that our takeoff distance would be about 2000 feet, which was twice what I usually used at Rosamond. The runway was 5850 feet long, so there was more than enough runway! I happened to look at the Rate of Climb chart, which predicted that I would have a 200 foot per minute climb (which isn't much). For some reason, I didn't comprehend in the least what that meant. Since it was October, the temperatures were fairly cool, which did help. The takeoff at Big Bear went just as expected—I lifted off after about 2000 feet. Then it got interesting. I was nailed right on my Best Rate of

Climb speed, and I was climbing...at all of 200 feet per minute. That's not very much, especially when you've never seen it before. I was looking around and trying to decide if I would need to circle to gain altitude. As it was, I got just high enough to turn left over the ridge. The ground level dropped away and instantly I was several thousand feet above the ground. I had no interest in ever taking a Tomahawk back there again.

Years later I would take the Bearhawk to Big Bear and experienced none of the previous drama. Of course, compared to the Tomahawk, the Bearhawk is ridiculously overpowered, so it can easily handle the high elevation airports.

### **Exercising the Privileges of My New Certificate**

On the morning of Friday, 1 November 1991, I was flying in an MC-130H Combat Talon II on some terrain following test point when I got the idea that I would like to go flying later that day. I knew that at that time the Hesperia restaurant was open for dinner. Most airport restaurants close around 1500, but this one didn't. After landing, I called and found the airplane was available. Being this was November, the sun would be setting about the time we took off. This wasn't a problem legally, since I was still night current from the last night flight I flew with Paul on 30 August 1991.

We launched into the dark and flew toward Hesperia. Remember what I said about how hard it is to find an airport during the day? It's WAY more difficult at night, especially if the airport is surrounded by other development. You would think that the runway lights would be easy to pick out, but they actually aren't as bright as the surrounding city lights. Therefore, the airport is the dark hole in the middle of all of the lights. We circled for at least 15 minutes trying to find the airport, and I was within 30 seconds of just giving up and flying back to Rosamond when I finally spotted it.

Partially because of this experience, I have not since flown at night as Pilot In Command for any reason other than training or currency. This is mostly because during the summer night comes too late for flying. In the winter, night comes early enough, but then it is cold. I'll do it again someday, but I'll need to have a good reason.

On 15 April 1992 I had a crazy idea to re-create my long solo cross country with my wife. We flew 3.8 hours from Rosamond to Nut Tree. The weather wasn't as good this time, and clouds prevented us from flying to Columbia. Therefore, we flew 1.8 hours to Watsonville instead, dodging clouds along the way. After that it was 2.4 hours back to Rosamond. After 8.0 flight hours, I realized that clearly I had forgotten just how long of a day that was. I wondered what I was thinking!

On a flight back from the east, probably to Hesperia or Apple Valley, I found myself approaching Rosamond as the sun was setting. I was solo, and needed to

change my prescription sunglasses back to my regular glasses. I reached back into my bag to the place where I always put my glasses, but couldn't find them there. Several more attempts came up with nothing. As I was entering the pattern, it was dark enough that I couldn't see with the sunglasses, so in desperation I just took them off. Fortunately, I was flying with an all-analog "steam gauge" panel, which was now fuzzy. I could see at a distance good enough, but not the panel. The good part was that I didn't need to see the panel sharply. I knew which direction each pointer should be pointing at any point in the pattern, and I could see that good enough. I made a successful fuzzy landing and taxied to park. Upon reaching into my bag again, the glasses were right where I expected them to be. I still don't know exactly what happened.

### **Upgrading (Temporarily) To A Better Airplane**

After some consideration, I decided that it was worth it to upgrade to a bigger (4 seat) airplane, even with the higher hourly rental rate. For some reason Paul wasn't available, so on 30 May 1992 I met with a CFI Reynolds (I can't read his first name) to check out in the Archer. As I recall, I didn't care for him much. He seemed bothered, had no concern about me as a pilot, and was just going through the motions to sign me off and collect his check. It was only one flight, but I seriously doubt that I could have gone through a whole program with someone like that. It really made me appreciate Paul and his approach to flight training. I can't say for sure, but I suspect that Paul's methods have somehow affected my methods for training glider pilots.

In the end, it really didn't matter much. I flew the Archer solo on 10 June 1992. On 27 June 1992 I flew my wife to Kern Valley (L05). Upon returning from Kern Valley, I remember writing up about five squawks, including the smell from fuel leaking from the fuel selector. After that, I left on a trip for about three weeks (probably the 1992 Appalachia Service Project trip with the church youth). When I came back, I went to Aronson's to ask if the squawks had been addressed. I looked for the maintenance records, only to be told that while I was gone that airplane had been sold! I guess that's one way to get rid of your problems.

### **Finishing Out In the Tomahawk**

With the Archer gone, there was really no option other than to go back to the Tomahawk. By this point my wife was much too pregnant to fly, so I took Mike Pelletier from the church choir on several flights.

On 13 December 1992, three days after Allison was born, I took the opportunity to take my father-in-law flying. We took off, intending to fly to Apple Valley. As we reached cruising altitude, I attempted to lean the mixture as Paul had taught me to do. I slowly pulled the mixture knob back, waiting for the engine to start running rough. I got to the point where it would normally run rough with no change. I kept pulling the knob back, getting all the way to the stop with no

change. Knowing something was wrong, I figured it would be best to have it wrong at the home field rather than somewhere else. We turned around and headed back to Rosamond. I shut the engine off with the ignition key instead of the normal method with the mixture. Later I would find out that the mixture cable had broken.

In May of 1993 I was getting very close to leaving California to move to Colorado. I figured it was better to just use up the money that I had on account at Aronson's than trying to ask for a refund. With this in mind, I took Mike Pelletier with me on a long cross country. On 2 May 1993 we flew down to Calexico (KCXL) in 2.6 hours. We had studied the traffic pattern at Calexico, and knew that the pattern was on the north side of the field. This was important, because trying to fly the pattern on the south side of the field would have put us in Mexican airspace.

While on short final for Runway 26, we heard another aircraft make a position report that they were on "short final". Not seeing any traffic and afraid that the other airplane was behind and right below us, I executed a go-around, climbed to pattern altitude, and turned to join downwind. As we were about to turn base, at least a minute after the go-around, I finally saw a twin show up at the point that I considered to be "short final". I've always figured they were flying "bomber patterns". That's when I learned that not everyone agrees on the size of the pattern or the locations of its various elements.

During the 2.7 hour return flight, we were approaching a ridge at the north end of the Coachella Valley just north of Palm Springs. We were flying along and I noticed we were descending. I pulled the nose up to climb back to our altitude. After a while I found myself at full power and best climb speed, yet we were still descending. I was very confused, until I remembered someone talking about descending air on the lee side of the mountains. I turned about 30 degrees to the right, and soon we had flown out of the sink and were climbing again. Many years later this idea of lift and sink would become part and parcel of being a glider pilot.

On 6 May 1993 I took my wife on a local flight. This would be my last flight with Aronson's since we were about to leave for Colorado. I ended up leaving about \$15 in my block account. Telling this story many years later, I would find out that I was exceptionally lucky to use up that much of my account, as Aronson's Air Service folded a few months after I left.

### **"Stand By For Explosion!"**

In 1991 or 1992 (don't remember which one) Martha and Paul invited me and my wife to their house for Thanksgiving dinner. Paul showed me around the house, and showed me a picture of his favorite airplane of all times, a Beechcraft Staggerwing. I asked him if he had ever owned one, and he said no in a way that

implied that was never going to happen. When I questioned him further, he explained that the big radial engine came with a big fuel flow that he figured he couldn't afford. That was when I learned that big engines may not necessarily be better.

Also invited to dinner was another couple whose names are lost to history. After consuming a wonderful meal and feeling stuffed, the lady leaned back, and in a wonderful British accent said "Stand by for explosion!"

### **Taildragger Checkout**

We moved to Colorado at the request of the government, and I found that my decision to buy a house resulted in having no extra money to support flying. In February of 1996 I learned about the Bearhawk, and decided that it was the airplane that I wanted to build. I chose it primarily because it was one of extremely few four seat aircraft in the homebuilt market. I also liked that it had a high wing. However, it was a taildragger ("conventional gear"). I didn't see that as a plus or a minus, but just another skill I would have to learn...eventually.

I built some tooling for the Bearhawk in Colorado, but didn't start making actual airplane parts until after moving back to California in 1996, again at the request of the government.

On the first leg out of Oshkosh 2004, Gary Aldrich said to me that I should probably start thinking about getting a taildragger endorsement. He was not willing to do that in his Cessna 180, but suggested that he thought Barnes Aviation at Fox had a Citabria that they used for that purpose. Even though by this time I had been flying a taildragger glider (Blanik L-23) for seven years and hundreds of landings, the FAA doesn't consider that sufficient. I had to get training in a taildragger "airplane" and get an endorsement attesting to that.

I called Barnes and asked if indeed they had a Citabria and gave taildragger checkouts. They said that they did. I asked who their taildragger instructor was and they said "Paul Minnicks". No other choices. Just Paul. Cool! I knew that this would be good since I had such a good experience with Paul before.

For most pilots a taildragger checkout should take about four flights and five to six hours to complete. With all of my taildragger landings in the L-23, I figured I was used to dancing on the rudder pedals, and this shouldn't take long.

Paul and I met on 25 September 2004. We briefed the flight, and then stepped to the airplane where he walked me through the preflight inspection. Paul had me sit up front, and he climbed in the back. Paul talked me through starting the engine, and then had me taxi to the runway. Possibly to his surprise, I taxied out just like I had been doing it for years. Paul demonstrated the takeoff, then handed me the airplane to climb to altitude and practice a couple of stalls. He took the airplane

back, and returned to the airport to demonstrate a pattern and landing. On the runway he passed me the airplane and told me to take off, fly around the pattern, and land, so I did. My takeoff and landing looked just as good as his.

He said “All right, do it again, just to prove it wasn’t a fluke.” So I did, again, with the same results. He seemed both happy and slightly annoyed that I did so well so fast. Paul took the airplane again, saying that he was going to takeoff and demonstrate what a crosswind landing would look like. I wasn’t sure how he was going to do that without a crosswind, but I think his point was to show a slip on final. As he turned final, I noticed that he was lined up beautifully—on Taxiway A. I looked at several airplanes taxiing directly toward us. I first thought he was going to now slip over to the runway or something, but after a while I wasn’t so sure. Eventually I said something like “Do you realize you’re lined up on the taxiway?” He gave the airplane a big rudder kick, looked out the side, and said something like “Oh, krap!” He then proceeded to the runway, showed me what he intended, and then thanked me profusely for preventing him from making a major error. He said it’s tough to see where you’re going from the rear seat.

We parked the airplane and walked back inside, having flown for about 0.6 to 0.8 hours and four landings. Apparently Paul felt it wasn’t credible that anyone could learn it that fast, so he wrote 1.3 hours and 9 landings in my logbook. So here I was “checked out” in the Citabria and I didn’t even know anything like a good climb or descent speed. I had to come back to sit in the airplane and study the flight manual before I flew it again. I ended up flying about 17 sorties in the Citabria before I figured I had learned all that I could from it.

## **Epilogue**

I originally applied to the US Air Force Academy with the intent of becoming an Air Force pilot. I failed to accomplish that goal because of my eyesight, something I couldn’t change. Yet somehow, I have unintentionally succeeded in that goal, just not the way I expected. In 2001 I became an FAA certificated Glider Flight Instructor. With that rating, I act as Pilot In Command flying gliders, teaching students FOR the US Air Force. I may not be an Air Force Pilot, but I am a pilot for the Air Force. That seems like such a subtle difference. I may not be flying C-130s, but I am flying as Pilot In Command. In December 2017, Gary Aldrich retired and I became the TPS Chief Glider Pilot. Since there are no other glider operations in Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC), I am also the Command Chief Soaring Pilot. Not bad for a kid who was told he couldn’t do that.

Continuing that idea, in 2018 TPS paid for me to be checked out as a glider tow pilot for the benefit of the Air Force. Transitioning to the single seat Pawnee tow plane was not very hard, since it taxis and flies very much like the Bearhawk.

I completed building my Bearhawk and made its first flight on 7 June 2008. There were some problems, and it wasn't until the third flight on 8 May 2009 that I was able to land when I was ready and not because I was having some in-flight emergency.

Now that I had a flying airplane at my disposal, there were a couple of loops that I wanted to close up. On 19 May 2012 I arranged for Paul to meet me at Rosamond Skypark during our EAA Chapter 1000 Fly In. I got him into the Bearhawk, and we took off for a short flight around the area. We only flew for 0.4 hours, or 24 minutes including ground ops. He didn't say much, and he wasn't interested in taking the controls himself. He did seem silently proud that his student had done so well. For me it felt like I was finally able to give back to the instructor who had done so much for me.



**Figure 9. Walking back with Paul after his Bearhawk flight**

The other loop I wanted to close was with Tom Hamblet, the man who had given me my unforgettable first flight. My Dad was still in contact with him, and Tom had seen the Bearhawk at Oshkosh in 2009. While I had the Bearhawk in Arlington TX during the 2011 Oshkosh trip, schedules didn't line up to allow me to take Tom flying. The Bearhawk was back in Arlington TX during the 2013 Oshkosh trip, and this time we made it work on 23 July 2013. Before flying, I made sure we recreated the photo from 1973.



**Figure 10. Paying back for the Young Eagle flight. See Figure 4.**

It wasn't a perfect re-creation, as we flew out of Arlington Municipal Airport (KGKY), which is 3.2 nautical miles southwest of Grand Prairie Airport (KGPM) where the original flight had happened (It seemed silly to fly from one airport to the other just to be exact). We took off, climbed to altitude, and I offered Tom the airplane just like he had for me all those years ago. He had a little trouble with it, which he explained as he was expecting it to respond like a Piper Cub but it was actually far more responsive. He gave it back to me and we returned to the airport. I would find out later that Tom had stopped flying a couple of years previous, but no explanation of the reason.

I felt fulfilled that I was able to give back to both of these men who had given to me, and doubly glad that I didn't wait any longer. If I had, I likely would have missed the opportunity.

### **Good Instruction Lives On**

A few times I had thought about Paul's admonition that "You don't have to land at Rosamond." Once was on the return from Oshkosh 2009. I had to go around, but was able to make a successful landing on the next attempt. Other times I had been able to get the Bearhawk down in about 15 knot crosswinds.

On 29 June 2019, I was returning with a pilot friend from Chino (KCNO) to Rosamond. I noticed a very strong south crosswind in the pattern, which caused some trouble lining up on final. On final I saw a 15 to 20 knot left crosswind. I forgot what Paul said about landing past the restaurant with a left cross wind. The first landing attempt was unstable and bounced on one tire. I tried to save it, but was blowing to the north of the runway. As the halfway point of the runway approached, I applied power to go around. I figured I would try it one more time. The pattern looked better, but again there were big gusts near the flare. Again I applied power to go around. I decided that was enough of that, and it was time to go to Fox. Before I could say anything, my copilot looked at me and simply said "Fox?".

We climbed to pattern altitude, circled long enough to switch my focus to another airport and get the ATIS. We headed to Fox where the runway was better aligned with the wind, the runway was three times wider than Rosamond, and there were no buildings near the runway to cause turbulence. Tower cleared us to land with winds blowing 230/20G28. I remembered that Gary told me that I'm not required to land parallel to the centerline, so I offset slightly to reduce the crosswind. This time I landed successfully on the first try. We taxied to parking and tied down the airplane before I even got out.

I thought about Paul's offer to come pick me up if I ever had to divert to another field. Unfortunately, I figured it would be extremely difficult to collect on that offer, even though he never rescinded it. So instead I texted Tuki, who with Emmy came and picked us up.

Early the next morning, before Pastor Terry's Retirement Service, I drove to Fox and flew the Bearhawk back to Rosamond. The landing was completely uneventful, just as Paul wanted it to be.