

# **Flying**

**Even the word is magical. Being a pilot is unique. There are but a relative handful of people on the face of the earth have the skill and experience to guide an airplane from the ground, into the air and to return it safely. It has always been my desire to fly.**

## **Influences**

**As a young boy (like most young boys) I had a fascination with airplane. Of course, I did not presume that I would ever be lucky enough to be actually pilot an airplane and certainly to own one was beyond happiness. At about age 11 I became exposed to airplanes through my childhood friend, Michael McCarthy, who had an engineer's fascination with the subject. I started to build models and read voraciously any book on the subject I could find. I was absolutely riveted by Charles Lindbergh's book "The Spirit of St, Louis", which, to date, I have read an estimated twenty time, cover to cover. The notion of filling an airplane with vast amounts of fuel and flying, almost forever was, and is, most intriguing. I read any airplane related novel dealing with World War II, and there were many of them, and tolerated the romance and sex, in order to experience the Flying Fortresses, Mustangs, and Mosquitoes. From General Chenault to Ira Eiker, I knew them all.**

## **The First Flight**

**My first flight in an airplane occurred about 1953 when I was almost ten years old. It was in Colonial Airlines DC3 flying from Burlington Vermont, where I was visiting my uncle Jud and his family, to Albany New York. I recall the deafening noise as the plane accelerated for lift off and the sight of the green earth pulling away. We climbed, the stewardess said, to the astounding height of five thousand feet, nearly a mile up. I always had fond memories of Colonial Airlines, long ago absorbed by American Airlines.**

## **Flying Lessons**

**In 1964, after college, my life changed when I got a real job working as a systems analyst at IBM. I was making the astronomical salary of six thousand six hundred dollars per year. I bought a Morgan sports car and took my first flying lesson. One unique thing about flying is the log book. It is a most accurate diary of one's life although it does little more than fix the pilot at point A on date B. The cryptic notes enter under remarks hardly say anything, but they are the key to a universe of memories. On October 28, 1965, I took my first flying lesson whose one hour and fifteen minutes is summed up with the single word "Orientation". But what a 75 minutes those were! I actually took off, climbed, turned, descended, and finally desperately directed the airplane in the general direction of the runway and jointly participated in my first landing. Our mount was a Piper Colt, the two-seat version**

of the Tri Pacer, as slow and simple an airplane as has ever existed. All my primary flight instruction took place at White Plains Airport, thirty miles north of New York City. Today, White Plains is the home of corporate New York's heavy jets. In 1965 it was a busy general aviation airport whose primary function, it seemed, was pilot training. I took a weekly flying lesson throughout the winter of 1965-66 under the autocratic supervision of a series of low mentality flight instructors. The principal method of instruction involved screaming, yelling, and mental abuse in the military model. But I persevered, and on May 31st of 1966, with 52 hour and 15 minutes of instruction under my belt, I took my private check ride and passed, respectfully if not brilliantly.

## **Early Perils**

I immediately joined a flying club and graduated to the much more modern Cessna all metal airplanes, flying principally the Cessna 150, 172, and 175. With sixty hours in the log books I was on top of the world and, in retrospect, highly dangerous to myself. The problem was, I didn't know better about a lot of situations. And I was not shy. I discovered a fascination for night flying (something I choose not to do today). In my first 100 hours, I shudder at some of the things that happened to me, quite unknowingly. And it was simply a case of not having the experience to know any better. In October 1966, I recall a takeoff at dusk from Watkins Glen airport with four adults and camping gear in a 172. Watkins Glen was a 2,500 foot dirt strip with tall trees at one end. I am amazed that we made it out of there. Later that same month, I flew into a thunderstorm over Florida and experienced some very unpleasant turbulence heavy rain, and low visibility. I flew into White Plains Airport at night from Washington and by the time we reached our parked car, the visibility in the fog was less than 100 feet. I hadn't a clue that fog was even a possibility. In February of 1977, while on the first leg of a trip to California (in a 150), I was suckered into a narrow valley in Central Pennsylvania in low ceiling and low visibility and no room to turn around. With lowering ceilings, I experienced carburetor icing, and have only the good advise from an airline pilot to thank for the avoidance of a crash landing. While returning from California, I had to make a forced landing in a field outside of Amarillo Texas when I ran into low ceilings (probably not a wise choice). All of these events were due to lack of experience, a heightened sense of invulnerability, and poor training. Fortunately, I survived, as do most pilots, and learned from my experiences.

## **Instrument Rating**

One thing I learned from my flight to California, a trip that took six days each way, was the need for an instrument rating. In the spring of 1968, while living in Williamstown Massachusetts, I started my instrument training with Bill Stine, the best instructor in the world, and in on August 10th took my instrument check ride and passed with flying colors. I consider Bill Stine on of my best friends, although we rarely see one another. He is today a big mucky muck at the National Business Aircraft Association (NBAA).

## First Airplane

Upon returning to the New York area in 1968, I explored the possibility of purchasing an airplane. Without a lot of serious thought and less mechanical inspection, I purchase a 1948 Cessna 140 tail dragger, N110X. With a few practice take offs and landings to my credit, the prior owner stated I was "safe" and disappeared. Well, in retrospect, I will admit that I never really learned to fly that airplane. I do have several dozen flight in my logbook in N100X which suggests that I successfully took off and landed, but I was never comfortable. An the airplane was really a piece of junk. I and my friend Peter Williams (who became half owner), did all sorts of maintenance on the airplane which is absolutely forbidden by the FAA. We finally decided to sell it in the spring of 1969 and the engine quite 8 times while I was delivering it for sale (faulty new gas caps preventing tank venting). Anyway, we traded it in on a better quality airplane, a 1957 Cessna 175, N7245M, with the infamous GO-300 geared engine.

## Anxiety

Maybe it was the Cessna 140 experience, but I was never comfortable in the new Cessna 175. I found my earlier fearlessness had been replaced by considerable anxiety whenever a flying opportunity came up. What's going on, I wondered? I forced myself to drive out to the airport every weekend to fly, somewhere, anywhere. After all, the airplane was costing me a lot of money and I damn well better fly the thing. It became a real mill stone around my neck. Fly the airplane. Fly the airplane. And every time I flew, I felt scared.

## My First Crash

Nonetheless I flew that airplane a lot and made several flights to Florida and the Bahamas, I did a fair amount of instrument flying, but no night flying. Each flight was a trial of nerves. On November 22, 1970, on a flight from Teterboro Airport to Atlantic City, the engine blew a cylinder off. I had a friend and neighbor with me who had never been in a light plane before. The engine failure caused a lot of black smoke to appear and my first thought was that we were going to burn to death. The vibration was tremendous and the only thing to do was to turn off the engine (which got rid of the smoke). I turned to my passenger and said "We have a problem". He thought I sounded pretty cool and (he said) did not worry too much more about the situation. But we were quite low (2,000 feet) and over a populated area, Haslett New jersey. I saw a large open field and made an approach but was way too high and fast. At the last minute, I made a 90 degree turn to the right at an altitude of 100 feet, and with my last few knots of airspeed, ballooned over a house and plopped the plane down into the back yard, a small field, actually. The field was very short, perhaps less than 500 feet, and I landed with the brakes locked. We made one or two bounces and then nosed over, slid on the spinner for another one hundred feet or so and came to a rest about fifty feet from the perimeter of the field. We jumped

out of the plane and surveyed the sorry mess of the crumpled nose gear and bent prop and the engine dripping oil from the amputated number 3 cylinder.

The police arrived as did my partner Peter. The next day we disassembled the airplane and towed it to an airport in Trenton where it was eventually repaired and returned to service. I decided to give up my interest in the airplane and with less than four hundred hours in my logbook, I took only the odd flying lesson for the next fifteen years. I could feel the anxiety that flying brought on and those feelings, it seemed, were quite justified.

## Los Angeles

In the summer of 1984 I took a consultant position at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, north of Los Angeles. It was a good job and I commuted weekly by commercial airline. I was spending a lot of money and time on the airlines, why not fly in my own plane, I thought. The sensible part of my self reminded me of the cost of airplane ownership and most of all, my anxiety, my fear of flying. "If you buy an airplane", my sensible half said, "You'll be making the worst mistake of your life. You'll hate it. You'll be scared. Don't do it!". My pilot half said "Remember the magic of flying".

So I began reading Trade-a-Plane and researching various types of airplanes. With a weekly commute to justify my flying, I needed an airplane equipped for instrument flying that was fast and economical to fly, and reasonably priced. It did not take long to narrow the search down to Mooney airplanes. It is known for its speed, economy, and the purchase price was perhaps half that of a comparable Beechcraft Bonanza. It was faster than a Cessna 182 and used 50 percent less fuel. The only possible drawback of a Mooney was its relatively cozy interior cabin space. Early model Mooneys were on the market in the low twenty thousand range.

## Niner Two Zero Eight Mike

I visited several Mooneys around the country. I made an offer for a Mooney in Alabama but it was sold before I could finalize the deal. In January of 1985, with the temperature at about ten degrees below zero, I flew to Denver to meet with the owners of a 1966 Mooney E-model, three United Airline pilots who were preparing for a strike and divesting themselves of excess assets. I first saw the airplane, N9208M, in the glare of the hanger lights which brightening up the dark winter's evening. It was polished like a diamond. As we stood there with our breath forming white clouds, I knew that I wanted this airplane. After a cursory inspection in the bone chilling cold, we retired to one of the owner's Jeep Cherokee, with the heater on full blast, four men set on making a deal. They obviously wanted to sell, and I, no polished negotiator, obviously wanted to buy. It did not take long. The asking price was \$23,000. We quickly settled on \$21,500. The deal was consummated with the agreement, if it flies, I'll buy it. We pushed the airplane from the warmth of the hanger, and in the blackest of nights, we flew from Longmont Airport to Denver

**International, where I was to catch my flight back to California. I'll never forget that flight. The handing over of the deposit check and the drafting of a contract of sale in the terminal building at Denver, was one of the high points of my life. This was now my airplane, and I was going to be flying again. I was in a daze as I flew (commercially) back to Monterey.**

**A few weeks later I returned to Denver and one of the owners, a DC-10 captain by trade, and a certified flight instructor, acted as check pilot as we flew the airplane back to Monterey. It was a great flight, over the Rockies at 13,000 feet to St. George Utah and then on to Monterey. In spite of 15 years of little flying, I acquitted myself well and did all of the flying except for the first landing at St. George. Gayle met us at the airport and we had a triumphal cocktail at the Old Stone House Restaurant under the flight patch of runway 28.**

### **Commuting**

**For the next three years, I commuted weekly by airplane to Los Angeles in my new Mooney, 9208M. I started slowly and cautiously since I was totally rusty in my flying and very non-current in my instrument skills. I took about twenty hours of instruction, mostly in instrument procedures. The flight to LA involved a fair amount of easy instrument flying, mostly because of stratus conditions at either end. During the winter months the flying got tougher and occasionally I'd have solid IFR throughout the one hour and 45 minute flight from Salinas to Burbank or return. But most importantly, I had no anxiety. Whatever had been troubling me fifteen year before was no longer a problem. I had a few mechanical problems with the airplane, and quite a lot trouble with the radios. I did a wholesale upgrade of the radios, acquiring a full set of digital radios, and from that time onwards, my navigation and communications was right on.**

**The most significant aspect of having the airplane was its effect on my family, Gayle, my wife, and my daughter Victoria. Gayle and I started taking numerous weekend trips and mini vacations that would have been impossible without the airplane. We visited such places as Sedona Arizona, Sante Fe, New Mexico. Death Valley, Mendicino, the Napa Valley, Sunriver Oregon, Gold Beach Oregon, and Vancouver, Canada. Mostly we visited her parents who lived in Northern California, in Red Bluff, a grueling six hour drive from our house. We could now make it in 90 minutes.**

**The plane had an even greater impact on Victoria, who was in college in Santa Barbara, California. I was able to drop in on her and have a quick dinner at the airport Elephant Bar Restaurant, or pick her up for a weekend in Monterey. At an age when we might have been drifting apart, we were getting closer and closer. These flying adventures took on particular importance with the flying vacations we took in the summers between 1986 and 1994. These were incredible bonding experiences between father and daughter>**

## **Oshkosh**

**Almost all of my flying vacations with Victoria were "camping under the wing" affairs. The first of these was in 1986 when we went to the EAA (Experimental Aircraft Association) Convention in Oshkosh Wisconsin, This was repeated in seven of the following ten years, and excluded only 1990, 1991, and 1992 when I went to Alaska instead. Oshkosh is a real experience both getting there and being there. I have, in each year, met up with my friend Peter Williams, who lives in New York, and who has owned a succession of Cessna 182's and Cessna 310's. We have learned how to camp out in an exceptionally lavish fashion. Oshkosh is total immersion in airplanes from the first engine in the morning to the last landing in the evening. 25,000 airplanes, pilots, and appreciative wannabe come together for a week to eat, breathe, and drink airplanes.**

**Just landing at Oshkosh is an experience. During the peak arrival times there may be 500 airplanes in the "landing pattern" which begins in Ripon Wisconsin, twenty miles away. Our first arrival was an eye opener. They were landing four airplanes at a time on each of two major runways. "Tighten it up there, white Piper on short final... Mooney put it down NOW on the numbers... Experimental land long past the VOR..." Gosh it is exciting! Peter also has a way with Gourmet food that makes one forget that one is living in a tent.**

**Camping in an airplane is really quite convenient. As long as an airport is not overly busy or commercialized, there seems to be little objection to pitching a tent for the night. If you buy gas, there is rarely a question about using the rest rooms, cooking dinner, or having a cocktail at dusk. It is really quite nice as long as the weather is reasonable. A few years ago we did have a memorable spate of bad weather upon our arrival in Oshkosh (related story).**

**Our vacations which were taken both with Tory and Gayle took us to such disparate places as Salt lake City (UT), Mount Rushmore (SD) , Sante Fe (NM), Taos (NM) , Amarillo(TX), Lubbock(TX), Fort Worth (TX), Broken Bow (OK), Fort Smith (AK), Chattanooga (TN), Louisville (KY), Charleston (SC), Bridgeport (CT), Richmond (VA), Washington (DC), New York, Cincinnati (OH), Indianapolis (IN), Cheyenne (WO), Billings (MT), Jackson Hole (WY), Little Falls (MN). Altogether, I and my Mooneys have crossed the country (at least most of the way from coast to coast), at least 10 times. On one memorable trip with Gayle, we stopped in Sunriver Oregon and liked it so much we bought a vacation house there. Now its a regular destination.**

## **Running Afoul of the FAA**

**A most illuminating experience occurred in the fall 1986 at Burbank Airport. I had been doing some instrument proficiency training with a friend and was returning to Burbank Airport at about 9:30 pm on a dark moonless night. To make a long story short, there were many problems with an inexperienced ground controller, out of**

service taxi lights, and conflicting taxiing traffic which caused me to inadvertently taxied onto the active runway 15. I was called onto the carpet by the tower chief and I apologized in all sincerity. A few weeks later I receive a certified letter from the FAA saying the incident is being investigated and did I have anything to add in my defense. Well, I wrote a six page letter with diagrams and an explanation. It was also, incidentally, an admission of guilt of a runway incursion infraction, no matter what the contributing causes were. The FAA announced that my license was to be suspended for 30 days. Ouch, I thought. I hired a windbag lawyer and we appealed to the NTSB. After hearing the evidence, the NTSB judge was apologetic but said his hands were tied. Based solely on the evidence I had provided, it was clear that an infraction had occurred. But he reduced the suspension to five days based on the mitigating circumstances and my "cooperation" with the investigation. So I surrendered my license on Monday morning as I flew into Burbank, and picked it up on Friday, in time to fly home. The lesson here is, if the FAA comes calling, don't answer the door.

## **Engine Failure, or My Second Crash**

In 1989 Gayle and I flew to the east coast during her summer break. On our return we made an overnight stop in Lubbock Texas from which we made an early morning departure, heading for Sante Fe, New Mexico. We had been in the air about 15 minutes when an unusual vibration got my attention. A minute later it was obvious that the engine was really sick and it began to shake and sputter and loose power and oil pressure. I declared an emergency and steered a course for Littlefield Texas airport which had a convenient NDB chirping away on the field. We landed without spilling a drop of Gayle's coffee but the airplane was really sick with a cracked cylinder that was about 10 degrees askew. How the airplane became whole again is the subject of another story, Tommy Carter.

## **Alaska**

Perhaps the best of the trips in 9208M were the two trips to Alaska. The first with Victoria in 1990 is documented in detail in my Alaska Diary. In that trip we flew to Alaska via the Alaska- Canada Highway and got as far north as Fort Yukon and the Arctic Circle. The second was a formation flying trip with my friend Gaylon McSmith who also owns a Mooney. In that trip we fearlessly flew up the coastal route stopping in Ketchikan, Sitka, Juneau, and Skagway on our way to Whitehorse. This was a male bonding trip with four guys, two planes and a weeks supply of C-rations. The weather was predictably horrible except for the final leg of the Alaska trip where we flew at 1,000 feet from Prince Rupert Canada to Bellingham through the beautiful Queen Charlotte Strait. One has to trust one's engine since the water temperature is 35 degrees.

## **N4452H**

**In the fall of 1991 the business climate at my company looked marginal and we decided to sell the airplane. It was a wrenching experience, and I was miserable for 18 months until I bought another airplane. See How Not To Sell Your Airplane. In the fall of 1993 I bought another Mooney, N4452H, a 1978 "201". This airplane never became beloved like "Mike". In fact, if the truth be told, it cost twice as much and didn't go any faster. The radios weren't very modern. But the owner, a dealer from Arkansas said he personally flew it to Alaska and that was good enough a recommendation for me. On my first cross continental trip, I had a complete electrical failure on Thursday and had to make an emergency landing at Paducah KY by cranking down the gear by hand and without radio communication with the tower. The following day, while in instrument conditions over Indianapolis, I had a complete vacuum system failure that left me flying with the turn coordinator and the whisky compass. I was grateful that the two problems did not beset me at the same time.**

### **Turbo Power**

**In the summer of 1994, my desire for a replacement for 45 Hotel, caused me to succumb to an advertisement for a turbo powered Mooney 231 N231ML is truly a wonderful airplane, powerful, versatile, with top of the line radios, and an autopilot that is a lot smarter than I am. I sold the 201 for a ridiculously low price and discovered the joys of breathing oxygen at 18,000 feet. Gayle and I flew it to South Carolina in the summer of 1995, and while she visited friends in Iowa, I spent five days at Oshkosh. In the summer of 1996, Tory and I flew to New Orleans, Nashville, Ohio, and of course, Oshkosh. A typical flight in 1ML was non-stop Salinas to Boulder Colorado in 3 hours 50 minutes at 17,000 feet.**

### **The Rest of The 08M Story**

**In the summer of 1996 I learned that the owner of N9208M, our previously owned Mooney E model, was declaring bankruptcy. I had the opportunity to buy back the airplane at an attractive price. The story about getting 08M back is quite an interesting tale. We put both of our planes up for sale. The 231 (N231ML) sold first. So now we are again a one Mooney family and that airplane is N9208M.**

### **The First Mooney Caravan To Oshkosh**

**Beginning in January 1998, I got involved in the organization of a flight off Mooney Aircraft to the Oshkosh Convention. It turned out, I played a major role in that affair and ended up being the lead aircraft in a flight of 42 planes. It was an incredible experience. The story of The First Mooney Caravan To Oshkosh and it's organization appeared in the November and December MAPA Log Magazine. It was very close to being king.**

### **Conclusion**



**At the time I write this (November 1998), my logbook records 2,400 hours, all but 385 hours in Mooneys.**

**Copyright © 1998, Jonathan Paul**