

## Something To Do With An Airplane

I was 15 years old and had just barely received my drivers' license. My father was an amateur pilot and held a one third interest in a Cessna 172 he shared with two of his friends. He would fly from Minneapolis to Duluth or Hibbing Minnesota to visit relatives or, more importantly, to hunt ducks. He had decided I should learn to fly too. I'm not sure why; It might have been a birthday present.

I was, at first, thrilled to give it a try. I think I was practicing piano and ear training almost all day every day and was, to say the least, very bored. My father introduced me to the trainer who immediately took me to a small office and started teaching me a zillion things about airlift, stabilizers, ailerons and so on. I was bored stiff in about 5 minutes but tried to pretend I was interested. After about an hour he declared the lesson over, and we scheduled my first flying experience for the next day.

I trained in an Aeronka Champ. It's a tiny, one engine plane with tandem seating and wings above the seats. It was pretty primitive and slow and landed at 30 mph or so. It felt like I could just jump out if anything went horribly wrong while landing. Thankfully it started with a starter motor. Some of the older planes had to have someone flip the propeller to get it going. It took me half hour trying to get it started without flooding it.

Then we practiced taxiing using the foot pedals to steer. It had a stick between my knees instead of a steering wheel. The instructor would show me how to do it then I would grossly over-steer and drive the plane all over the place; anywhere but straight ahead as was intended. The lesson ended as I finally got the hang of steering the beast.

**Next week, next lesson.** The trainer got the plane into the air; then I practiced steering the plane in the air which was even more difficult than on the ground. I had to coordinate the movement of the stick with the pedals. Amazingly I got the hang of this pretty fast. He showed me how to set the compass heading and keep the plane going that way. I quickly learned about wind and direction and so on. It was pretty interesting. Next was takeoff which was very easy unless there was a strong crosswind.

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Then he shot some landings and let me steer and take off again as soon as the plane touched down. I finally got to learn how to land it and even land in a cross wind. That involved heading the plane into the wind a little until right before you stalled out to land then kicking a pedal to get the plane pointed straight down the runway. He said I was very good at that.

After very few lessons (it seemed to me) he said I was ready to solo. I was shocked. We had taxied over to the office and stopped the engine. I thought the flying lesson was over for the day, but he jumped out and said, "Take her up and shoot 3 landings." By this **time**, I was pretty cocky about my flying skills so up I **went; circled** the airport and made a perfect approach. I was drifting in with the plane maybe 10% into the wind and kicked it to point up the runway **perfectly... almost!** I landed a little awry and the plane shot off the runway. I panicked, overcorrected, and veered back across the runway to the other side with the wing almost touching the ground as the plane raised up on one wheel. Luckily, I was only going 25 mph or so.

I finally got it under control and taxied back to the office thinking I had flunked and that was the end of that. But no! He said, "**not** bad. Take her around two more times." I could hardly believe my ears. I thought I had almost destroyed the plane. But I did it and successfully and never had a problem with landings again.

Eventually, I soloed for one or two hours at a time taking the plane to chosen beacons and back or in triangular routes. It became routine and easy and finally extremely boring. My next task was to study to get licensed for visual flight and start learning instruments in my father's plane. But it no longer held any interest for me and I never progressed any further.