

## My first passenger.

A little backstory is perhaps in order before I tell the tale of my first passenger and the impact he had on me.

I joined EAA Chapter 2 based at Smith Field, Fort Wayne Indiana while living in Auburn Indiana about 20 miles away. The chapter was very involved with the Young Eagles program and held rallies on the second Saturday of the months of May, June, August, and September (skipping July for Oshkosh).

I started working the rallies escorting riders and parents to and from the planes for rides and graduated to marshaling and parking planes and working the ramp.

On a given Saturday in the summer our Chapter 2 would fly up to 100 or more kids in a rally with as many as seven or eight planes and sometimes a helicopter. What a great place to learn about aviation!

As I became more involved and very much enjoyed the excitement and camaraderie at the club rallies, I bought a portable radio, and I would listen on the CTAF to the pilots calling their turns at the designated intervals in the route and especially to the calls as pilots approached the pattern to land. I learned a lot in those first two summers! In fact, I decided I wanted to do that... I wanted to be a Young Eagles pilot.

I began my pilot training in June of 2007 in a Piper J-3 Cub and earned my tailwheel endorsement with it, flew my student solo cross country in the Cub, did my pilot check ride, and received my Sport Pilot license in the same Cub on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

During that summer I had the great fortune to fly a J-3 Cub belonging to the Hoosier Air Museum in Auburn, Indiana where I was also a member and an officer. Another member pilot and my mentor Larry Stone and I shared the chores and expense of flying the museum Cub and it was a big bonus for me.

Fast forward to March 2008 when Larry and I flew a 1946 Aeronca 7AC Champ my wife and I purchased from Goldsboro North Carolina to Auburn over the course of two weekends. But that is another story!

The Hoosier Air Museum was located at KGWB DeKalb County Airport in Auburn and happened to be just four miles from my front door and the Champ fit in the aircraft collection very well and in the same genre as the Cub, so I was able to log a lot of hours in our new to us Champ those first few months.

EAA Vintage Chapter 37 is based at KGWB which I also belonged to so as the first rally for 37 on the first Saturday of May approached, I asked the Young Eagles coordinators if the club thought I was proficient enough with 122 hours to date to fly my first Young Eagle.

Little did I know that the airport manager who became a very good friend and fellow pilots and members of EAA Vintage Chapter had been witnessing my many, many, many, comings and goings in the Champ and occasionally even the Cub. There was a joke that the Vintage officers would sit in lawn chairs smoking cigars and scoring my landings like an Olympic event!

I was given the approval to fly the first rally of the season and I applied to EAA National for the course and background check. I was excited to fly my first Young Eagle!

May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008 dawned bright and clear as I pushed the Champ out of the hanger of the Hoosier Air Museum and warmed it up with a couple of touch and goes in the pattern. I parked among the other planes at the Vintage hanger and awaited the pilot's briefing at 0-nine hundred.

Parent's and grandparents were registering the youth and pilots were discussing various aspects of the weather and route and generally getting in rally mode. The Champ along with an Ercoupe and Cub were slower than the rest of the planes, so we were assigned the same route but inside making a somewhat shorter oval.

My name was called, and I walked out along the caution tape barrier marking the gate to the escorts for rides and was introduced to my first Young Eagle passenger. The young man was blind... totally blind I was informed.

I must admit this wasn't at all what I expected for my first rider. I didn't know what to say so finally after looking a bit dumbfounded, I said "Okay! Let's go for an airplane ride!".

The young man was maybe 10 years old, and he had all kinds of questions and wanted to touch the control surfaces and move them and he also asked to touch the panel and he felt the bezels around the glass lenses to the instruments and I couldn't imagine what information he could possibly be getting but he was giddy with anticipation.

While he was seated, I went over the required passenger briefing and had him work the stick while he couldn't quite reach the pedals, but we talked about them and the rudder.

We had a great conversation about airplanes and flying during that flight and even though I have since forgotten his name I'll never forget his face beaming with joy when he climbed out of the Champ. He gave me a big hug and said thanks a million and as I turned him over to his mother and escort, I had to excuse myself to retrieve something in the plane I had forgotten... to hide my tears.

Brad Moore



