

The Birthday Boy

My motivation for getting a pilot's license was wanting the opportunity to fly kids in the Young Eagles program and participate as a volunteer pilot at rallies. Of those two-hundred and some officially recorded flights a few of the experiences remain indelibly etched in my memory.

On a beautiful morning in May in 2009 at Auburn/DeKalb County Airport in Auburn, Indiana our combined EAA chapter of Chapter 2 from Smith Field, Fort Wayne and EAA Vintage Chapter 37 at Auburn were holding a scheduled rally and things were hopping!

Riders, their parents, families, and guests were seated in chairs behind the safety line as escorts walked with the pilots and riders to their respective planes for rides. I could feel the excitement in the air, see the smiles, and hear the laughter as the riders anticipated a ride or exited an airplane. We had a large crowd, and we were busy!

One of my riders that morning was a boy about nine years old. He was with his mother who thanked me several times for taking her son for a ride before we even reached the plane. Not being judgmental but I could tell they didn't have a lot from their demeanor and appearance.

I sometimes got the feeling a passenger was at the rally because a parent dragged them out of bed on a Saturday morning when the youngster would have rather made other plans. Other riders were so excited and so into the adventure they could hardly contain themselves. This young lad was a bit timid, but I could tell from his oohs and aahs that he was really enjoying this program.

After a couple of rallies, I was able to tell if a rider was interested in spending time with the walk around and description of the plane or if they just wanted to get on with the ride. This Young Eagle wanted the full experience!

I took a little extra time with him walking around the Aeronca Champ and showing him the control surfaces and how they were moved by the stick and pedals in the cabin. We loaded up and after the required passenger briefing, we began our taxi to the flight line.

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During the flight I offered to let him fly the plane a little bit if he chose to do so and he gleefully accepted the stick. He couldn't quite reach the pedals, so I worked those for him as he felt the motion of the plane with movement of the ailerons and elevator.

We had a good conversation during the short flight, and he told me that he played with folded paper airplanes and cheap balsa gliders purchased from the local grocery store and read library books about aircraft. He liked airplanes!

When we parked and shut down the escort opened the cabin door, and the young man jumped out and hugged his mother telling her this was the best birthday present ever! She beamed with pride and continued to thank me as we walked back to the registration desk for his certificate and logbook with his first Young Eagle entry.

Happy Birthday, young man...and clear skies!