

Jack Edens

I have known Robie since the 1960's and when he told me his son was a flight instructor, I jumped at the chance to learn how to fly. One time, Robie, Steve, Cricket and I – and maybe little Joe Fletcher - flew 32W to Cleveland, Tennessee and bought a tri-pacer for \$3,500.00. (19D) Robie put up the money and we were to pay him 1/3 each. Steve and I were broke. My flying lessons started in that tri-pacer, and it was great! I don't think I had ever enjoyed anything so much. Steve had a way of building confidence in a student that no other instructor, even Evelyn Johnson, could do.

On one Sunday flying trip, Steve, Robie, Cricket and I left the Johnson City airport to visit Cricket's Grandparents in Oliver Springs, TN. The plane's gas gauge said $\frac{1}{2}$ full in each wing. We were flying an old Comanche. Usually that was enough gas to get us there and we planned to fill up when we got there. We were at 5,000 feet MSL over Knoxville when Steve tapped the gauge with his finger and said, "those gauges haven't moved one bit." At that very minute the engine sputtered and ran out of gas! I thought Cricket was going to squeeze Robie's leg off when she grabbed him. It's funny now, but not then. We glided to the Powell airport, landed, filled up with gas and went on to Oliver Springs.

Another time I remember flying with Steve, we were doing touch and go's in the tri-pacer one March afternoon and the wind was howling out of the West. We were flying out of the Greeneville airport, and it was really rough! We were bouncing and bumping around like crazy. Steve looked at me and said, "ain't this fun? This is good practice for you." Steve taught me to fly in all kinds of weather and it has paid off for me many times over. He always would say, "relax and fly with the wind" and how right he was. I have dusted crops in Tennessee and Texas in 25-30 mph winds, and like Steve said – go with the wind.

When I was still a student of Steve's, I would get so frustrated at him because he would be 20 minutes late and I was ready and waiting. I wanted to fly that bad! I'll never forget how he demonstrated negative-G forces to me one day. He put a pack of cigarettes on the dash and pushed the yoke forward real fast. Those cigarettes floated all the way to the back seat.

One Sunday morning Steve was checking me out at Decker's Farm in the old Stinson Voyager that we used to carry jumpers in. It only had one seat, which was reserved for the pilot. We looked and looked for the right seat in the hangers but couldn't find it. Steve found a cinder block, we put it in the plane, and he sat on that block and checked me out with no problem. That Stinson was a real dog – I don't think we even had the door on the plane! On a later flight in the Stinson, we were taking jumpers up and the right mag went out so Steve had me check the left mag twice so the jumpers wouldn't notice anything. Well, that's what I did. I think it was on a Saturday afternoon. Well, on Sunday morning I

loaded 4 or 5 jumpers in the plane for the first jump of the day. We climbed out to 2,500 feet so they could drop the streamer and right over the airport the other mag quit on me. Those jumpers bailed out of that plane so fast I didn't even see them leave the door. I think that was my first-ever dead stick landing. I told Steve about it later on and he laughed and said, "well, those things happen!"

There were many good stories about flying the old Stinson, and I hope Robie tells the story about when they sold it and flew it out West. That turkey farm story was the funniest I ever heard.

Cricket and I got such a laugh out of Steve when he wrapped his wing-tip shoes with duct tape to hold them together! Steve was a hoot.

I built a 700 foot grass airstrip behind our house (where Robie lives now) and Steve said that was a good thing to do, because learning to land on such a short strip would come in handy someday. He was so right about that. I have landed short many times since then.

I started crop dusting when we moved to Sweetwater, TN in 1975 (or 1977). I was also working on the farm and due to my heavy workload, I asked Steve if he wanted to come and do the flying for me. He thought about it for a day or two and called me back. He said he would like to get into crop dusting, and planned to come to Sweetwater and do the flying. I can't remember why we never got together, it just didn't work out.

I have been crop dusting now for 25 years or so and have accumulated around 18,000 hours of flying. I have flown all kinds of dusters, turbine and piston. I've totaled 2 planes and made several forced landings. I have hit power lines, birds, trees, broke off landing gear and knocked off various parts and pieces, cut off wing tips, you name it! I guess I have done it all and through all that, I will always believe that Steve's good, solid basic training has carried me through. I have never forgotten some of the things he gave me in the way of advice that have been so beneficial to my flying career. Steve put me through all kinds of maneuvers that could be done for a student to do. I don't think this type of training is done these days. We, or the aviation world, needs more instructors of his caliber! It has been a pleasure for me to remember him.

P.S. Steve and Julie came to tell stories at Hillsboro for my customers a few years ago. I have never seen grown men and women so taken with their performance. They were so entertaining. I was so proud.