

Fathers and sons and airplanes

The first flight with his first-born

BY STEVEN B. WALLACE

Boeing Field/King County International Airport is south of downtown Seattle, past the stadiums and the old Rainier brewery, in an industrial area between Interstate 5 and the Duwamish Waterway. An unlikely location for a hallowed place. Boeing Field is my family's Pacific Northwest spawning ground.

My parents arrived there, separately and unacquainted, in the months following the attack on Pearl Harbor. He had come to fly for Pan American Airways after learning to fly in the pre-war Civilian Pilot Training Program at what is now Lambert-St. Louis International Airport. She had come from West Seattle, just across the Duwamish Waterway, via the University of Washington. With young men largely drawn into the war effort, Pan American had gone to the university in search of female math students it could train to be celestial navigation instructors. She was the first one, hired at age 19, to teach pilots how to find little islands in the Pacific before their fuel ran out. All of her students were men, and they were all older than she was. The local papers thought it was a big deal and wrote articles about her, which today seem sexist. The best of these hangs on the wall in my office. She can still tell you how to make a sun line approach to Wake Island.

A few years after my working life had begun in New York, I was offered a job with a view of the runway at Boeing Field. I don't remember any thought process; I just went back. The salmon thing, I guess. It was 1979.

The next year my father died. Then my son was born and took his name, William Baird Wallace. They missed each other by six months.

The logbook entry for the day I took my son for his first airplane ride says, "A



Author Steven Wallace gives his son Baird a ride around the Paine Field airshow in Everett, Washington, about the time the youngster took his first airplane ride with his dad.

perfect day." It is not a reference to the weather, although the weather was perfect too.

On this day we have been talking about daddies teaching their kids to fly

airplanes, and he thinks that all daddies teach their kids to fly. He even thinks that is how you can tell who a kid's daddy is; just find out who taught him how to fly an airplane.

SEATTLE GIRL TEACHES CELESTIAL NAVIGATION



JUDY MOULTON, instructor in celestial navigation, checks a problem on the sextant she holds in her hand. In the background may be seen instruments used by United States Weather Bureau.

PRETTY Judy Moulton, former University of Washington student, is teaching classes of men at Pan American Airways school here to be air-captains in a professional manner. Her going has always interested Judy, not life-saving, but navigating as a business.

One of the pioneers in a new field for the use of women's services, Judy has just been appointed instructor in celestial navigation for Pan American Airways Alaska division. She is the only woman authorized to teach celestial navigation in the Pan American system.

Miss Moulton, a native of Seattle who lives at 7207 15th Ave. S. W., began as navigation clerk in Pan Am's Seattle office, and soon thereafter completed a course in dead reckoning and celestial navigation at the system school in San Francisco. All of Judy's students at the Boeing Field system



Looking through the sextant, an instrument for measuring angles, Judy Moulton demonstrates use of the device to her class. They are all men.



I never take for granted the beauty of driving across the Mercer Island floating bridge—Lake Washington, two mountain ranges, evergreens, and the city skyline. Then it's a short jaunt south on Interstate 5 to the Boeing Field Perimeter Road and into the Boeing Flying Club. We walk inside and check the books, grab the keys, and walk out to the flight line, where I begin a preflight inspection, holding a fuel sampler in one hand and a little blond boy in the other. I drain a sample of 80-octane avgas from the left tank sump drain, and he says it looks like Kool-Aid. I tell him that different types of airplane fuel are made in different colors, to reduce the chance of putting the wrong kind of fuel in your airplane, which can ruin a fun day, like we're having. I give him the fuel sampler and lift him up easily to the Cessna's high wing to let him take the next sample. We look for bubbles of water or contaminants or any little creatures that look like they belong in a Dr. Seuss book but not in your fuel tank. Fuel in the tanks, oil in the engine, air in the tires, it's time to strap in the copilot.

At three years of age he can just reach the controls if I put him in his car booster seat and slide the seat all the way forward. The yoke, that is; no hope for reaching the rudder pedals, so the copi-

lot will be limited to two-axis control today, pitch and roll. Less confusing without the rudder anyway, for lesson one of "Daddy teaches his boy how to fly an airplane." We can work on the yaw axis when he grows up enough to reach the rudder pedals, but today I am in no hurry to see him grow up.

They give us Boeing Field's long runway, 10,000 feet, which is 9,500 feet more than our lightly loaded Cessna needs to get airborne. Our excuse for flying today is lunch at Harvey Field, Snohomish, Washington, runway length 2,600 feet. Just right to let the Cessnas in and keep the big guys out. The most sophisticated aid to navigation is a homemade plywood approach slope indicator, so we line up those boards, hold 65 knots with full flaps, and land with all the precision required for weekend flying.

Wallace's parents fostered his love for aviation. His mother, Judy, taught celestial navigation for Pan American and his father, Baird (bottom left), flew for Pan Am. The couple met at Boeing Field outside of Seattle after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

The only thing better than finding a charming little café out in the country is finding one at a country airport. Haute cuisine at Harvey Field is hamburgers, french fries, cokes, and a smiling face across the table. We get a pack of Mentos to go. Neither of us has seen a pack of Mentos since without thinking of that day.

I love little airports like this. After lunch we walk around and look at the wonderful variety of small airplanes tied down in the grass. Lots of antiques and homebuilts. We stop and chat with a few

tinkering owners. They all have a smile for Baird. Of course he can sit in their airplane.

Hanging around the airport is fun, but he wants to get back in the air, so we're off, heading east, going nowhere in particular, Glacier Peak and the North Cascades magnificent in the distance. Time for some serious airwork, starting with a few climbs and descents, a few lazy turns. He is following me on the controls, and it sure is easy and fun. I think I'll wind him up into some steeper turns, so after looking around for traffic, I roll the little Cessna slowly to the right, to put my copilot on the low side of the turn. Just 30 degrees of bank to start. A touch of nose-up trim and we hold altitude with one finger lightly on the yoke. Ho-hum. After one 360 I tighten the

around 3,000 feet above the ground, is that his daddy is sitting next to him. A child's unconditional trust. I love this boy. Around and around we go.

A few more turns and I slowly roll the airplane back to wings level. He is howling with laughter and describing our maneuvers in words I cannot follow. I give him a minute to get his vertigo and laughter under control, then tell him that he can fly the airplane all by himself, and point in the general direction of Boeing Field. I explain the altimeter to him and he starts to chase it up and down, but amazingly little. The Nintendo generation quickly senses and corrects any tendency to overcontrol.

Tachometer at the bottom of the green arc, the power setting for going nowhere and not caring when you get

bulence within a hundred miles, the sun is still fairly high over the Olympic range, and it is warm inside our little airplane. I look over at my intrepid copilot, and he is sound asleep. Sun on his face, head back on his shoulder at a crazy angle, lips slightly parted, his chest rising and falling slowly in a rhythm as perfect as this moment in my life. Forever pictures. Keep them and return to them when you lose track of what is important.

Turning base leg to final approach is my favorite part of flying. As the power comes further back even the airplane seems to relax. A pilot having a bad day might use too much aileron; a pilot having a worse day might use too much rudder. A pilot having a good day uses just the right amount of each, makes a single smooth turn at a constant rate, rolls out on the runway heading and centerline, and the ball stays in the center and the sleeping boy's head does not roll around on his shoulder. I am having a very good day. Kiss the touchdown, taxi to the Boeing Flying Club, into the airplane's tiedown spot, mixture lean, magnetos off. As the gyroscopic instruments slowly wind down, the only other sound is his breathing. He is still asleep; it is the greatest accomplishment of my flying career.

I walk around and open the door on his side, undo his seat belt, and lift him out of the seat and against my chest. He begins to wake up and puts his hands around my neck, the best feeling in the world.

One of the Boeing Flying Club instructors, Dennis Barry, comes over to say hello. A man of precise skills, by day he builds wind-tunnel models for Boeing, after hours he is a flight instructor. Not to confuse Baird with the advanced ratings I am working on with Dennis, I just introduce him as the man who taught me how to fly an airplane. During the few minutes we talk it strikes me that Baird is somehow riveted by him; then Dennis has to go fly. As I stand there holding Baird, a short distance down the Boeing Field Perimeter Road from where my parents met more than 40 years earlier, he watches Dennis walk away, then turns to me and asks: "Is that man your daddy?" ACPA

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My copilot is squealing with delight, as around and around we go. It's just a video game that you feel in the seat of your pants.

turn, increasing the bank to 45 degrees, and more nose-up trim. He is looking around and seems to be enjoying this just fine, so over we go to 60 degrees, and another dose of trim. This is where things start to look and feel a little crazy to the uninitiated. In a level turn at 60 degrees of bank the centrifugal force presses you into your seat with exactly twice your normal weight, and causes your cheeks to sag a little, especially if you have the pinchable kind. Add in the horizon spinning around in the windshield closer to vertical than horizontal, and adults often turn green and beg you to stop.

But my copilot is squealing with delight, as around and around we go. It's just a video game that you can feel in the seat of your pants. He first looks out his side window straight down the chimney of a farmhouse, then out the windshield where the horizon is going around at an impossible angle. He becomes delightfully disoriented. The engine's steady drone is pierced by his voice, small, but strong and clear, "Daddy! The plane's upside down!" Joy undampened by fear. He doesn't understand the laws of aerodynamics that permit this maneuver. He doesn't understand the stress margins built into the airplane. All he understands, pinned into his seat spinning

there, and the Pacific Northwest slides slowly by below—the Snoqualmie River, the Burlington Northern Railroad, little Pacific Northwest towns, Gold Bar and Sultan, Maltby and Duval.

We descend slowly over deep and pristine Lake Washington, the Cascade range close on the left, the Olympic range in the distance on the right. Mount Rainier, looming 65 miles away, fills the windshield. To the right is the Seattle skyline and I can see Swedish Hospital, where both my copilot and I were born. Just ahead and to the left is Mercer Island, where we live, and where in a year or so I will teach him how to ride a bicycle; but today we are working on airplanes, and it is going very well.

I switch the radio to listen to the recorded information for landing at Boeing Field, and now it is time to talk on the radio, and I ask my copilot to give me the airplane back.

"Boeing Tower, Cessna Five-Two-Eight-Zero-Seven, Evergreen Point Bridge, landing, ATIS Bravo."

"Cessna Five-Two-Eight-Zero-Seven, enter right downwind for Runway Three-One Right, report the hydro pits."

In a few minutes we turn downwind over Beacon Hill, I pull the throttle back to slow down for the traffic pattern, and it gets quieter. There isn't a bump of tur-