

LIFE OF AN AVIATOR

SHORT STORIES

by
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The Magic of Flight



The Magic of Flight

And

The Free Spirit

I am not sure when my love affair with airplanes began but it has been a long lasting affair that has had as many ups and downs as any relationship. However, after forty years of devotion to airplanes, they remain one of the three true loves of my life. So, how can I best describe this magic? I will start with a passage from Anne Morrow Lindbergh's book, "North to the Orient," as we begin to work on painting a picture of this magic with words:

"Flying implies freedom to most people. The average person who hears the drone of a motor and looks up from the walls of a city street to see an airplane boring its way through the clear trackless blue above- the average person, if he stops to use his imagination, may say to himself casually, "Free as a bird! What a way to travel! No roads- no traffic- no dust- no heat- just pick up and go!"

In that careless phrase he is apt to overlook what lies behind the word "free." He is apt to forget, or perhaps he never knew, the centuries of effort which have finally enabled man to be a bird, centuries of patient desiring, which reach back at least as far as the Greek world of Icarus. For Icarus, trying to scale the skies with his waxen wings was merely an early expression of man's desire to fly. How long before him the unexpressed wish wrestled in the minds of men, no one can tell.

And since flight is not a natural function of man; since it has been won by centuries of effort; since it has been climbed to arduously, not simply stumbled upon; since it has been slowly built, not suddenly discovered, it cannot be suspended as the word "freedom" is suspended in the mind. It rests, firmly supported, on a structure of laws, rules, principles- laws to which plane and man

alike must conform. Rules of construction, of performance, of equipment, for one; rules of training, health, experience, skill, and judgment, for the other”.

Is this magic, this freedom, that we earthbound bipeds associate with flight actually the release of the free spirit in all of us? I believe that true freedom is magic and therefore this release of all earthbound pressures as you enter the realm of endless blue skies in your winged craft is a free spirit experience shared, and understood, by only a few -- but wished for by many. Are there rules? Yes. Are there limitations? Yes. However, let's push aside the structured environment, the history of trial and error, and the obvious risk while we explore the magic of flight in its purest form.

Now consider how Anne Morrow Lindbergh's partner in life, Charles Lindbergh, described this magic/freedom of flight and airplanes in his writings from the “Spirit of St Louis:”

“I may be flying a complicated airplane, rushing through space, but in this cabin I'm surrounded by simplicity and thoughts set free of time. How detached the intimate things around me seem from the great world down below. How strange is this combination of proximity and separation? That ground — seconds away — thousands of miles away. This air, stirring mildly around me. That air, rushing by with the speed of a tornado, an inch beyond. These minute details in my cockpit. The grandeur of the world outside. The nearness of death. The longness of life.”

For me it is easy to see the contrast between what Mrs. Lindbergh said and that of her husband. But did you detect the difference in the thought process of these two aviators? For sure, Mr. Lindbergh understood the history of his profession, as well as the structured environment that he operated in, but why did he travel the road less traveled and get the nickname, “The Lone Eagle”?

The free spirit is found in all of us but not many have the ability to release this energy and get in touch with this side of their personality. Most of us only want to deal with the familiar and predictable things in life and to venture beyond your comfort level is much the same as you trying to get your pet out of the pet carrier when you arrive at the animal hospital. So, where does my life, or your life as a future aviator, fit into the free spirit equation?

I went in search of words that would, or could, best describe my personality and what I consider to be my free spirit approach to life and aviation. Not much out there except what academia has to offer so here is my definition, which is actually a compilation of my thoughts and the feedback I received from friends and colleagues boiled down to a few simple sentences:

“A free spirit is one who is inclined to explore life and taste new experiences that exemplify, and hold true, to their personal convictions as opposed to allowing the masses to influence their direction and thinking; however, above all else the free spirited individual is one who thinks freely and has the courage to hear that inner voice and follow the road less traveled without regret or intimidation.”

Do the words above strike a chord? Can you relate to the personality traits found in the words - ***The grandeur of the world outside, the nearness of death, and the longness of life*** - that Charles Lindbergh shared with the world about his experiences and beliefs? If yes, then maybe you are a free spirit and are ready to experience the magic of flight. But how can you be sure?

When we began this chapter I tried to illustrate both sides of the thought process that I referred to as the magic of flight, but my focus was purely on the free spirit experience. As you may have guessed, there is a bit more to the experience than that. The structured environment of aviation and the aerodynamic principles that makes the magic not so magical has to be mastered. Not easy, not hard, just part of the process when you are destined to master the third dimension.

Volume one, of Robert Novell’s short stories, will introduce you to but a few of the aviation professionals I have flown with over the years and I hope that you find common threads in their free spirited approach to life and aviation. However, before we move forward, I want to leave you with a few words from Mr. Ernest K. Gann that will complete our picture titled:

The Magic of Flight

Are we lost, or are we found at last?

On earth we strive for our various needs, because so goes the fundamental law of man.

Aloft, at least for a little while, the needs disappear.

Likewise the striving.

In the thoughts of man aloft, food and evil become mixed and sometimes reversed.

This is the open door to wisdom.

Aloft, the earth is ancient and man is young, regardless of his numbers, for there, aloft he may reaffirm his suspicions that he may not be so very much.

This is the gateway to humility.

And yet, aloft there are moments when man can ask himself --- "What am I, this creature so important to me?

Who is it that rules me from birth to tomb?

Am I but a slave destined to crawl for labor to hearth and back again?

Am I but one of the living dead, or my own god set free?"

This is the invitation to full life. . . .

"Where are we?"

"If you really must know, I'll tell you."

"Never mind - Here aloft, we are not lost, but found."