



Trip Report

The Adventures of Doug VanCleaf

Doug VanCleaf
Betsy, Cessna C210

Well, Thad, you've only been asking me to do this for a couple of years, so I guess I had better get started...

I was born a poor black child, (oh, wait, drat, that's Steve Martin's line).

Some of this will be embarrassing, so I hope nobody who knows me ever reads it.

All I ever wanted to do for a career was fly. As a pre-teen, my yet-to-be-diagnosed ADD could indeed focus on some details, as long as the details were about airplanes. I probably knew everything that was possible for a 10-year old to know about aviation in the US. I once told an amazing story to my class about our visit to the control tower and simulator complex in Sarasota, Florida after our very first family vacation, flying out of LaGuardia on a National Airlines 727. Problem was, I'd never been to a control tower or simulator complex, except in my aviation-consumed mind. Imagine my parent's surprise when my teacher told them how impressed she was at the next parent-teacher conference. Yes, I had some explaining to do. I think I was grounded for about 5 years. Oops.

I had an Air Force ROTC scholarship to U of F in aerospace engineering that went south with the 1975 budget cuts, and could not afford college on my own, so I ended up flying a nuclear submarine (from the power plant end) for 6 years. A great experience, but not at all what I had intended. In the early years, I was a complete wreck, because everything I had ever planned to do was now a distant and painful memory, and I'd never even thought of a plan B. Marriage at least gave me purpose, and a few years later I had a pretty good career underway in the commercial nuclear power business, but still no license to fly. When a close friend from church told me he was about to buy a plane and start on his pilot's license, I wrangled my way into his deal and started also. My wife reluctantly gave permission for this adventure, but only because I gave her an alternative – motorcycle road racing. I'm still not sure what she was thinking.

I learned to fly at a small hill-top strip in Cumming, Georgia, in N8817S, a 1966 Cessna 150 that Ken and I bought for \$7500.00. It was basic but in very good condition, had an Apollo Loran that my instructor never did let me use, and I don't think it ever went more than a week without me cleaning it. Ken also took good care of it, and I'm sure all of the airport gang had many a laugh at our obsessive 'newbie' behavior.

The airport, Mathis Field (84A), was 1500' long, 20' wide, had a dogleg in the 1st third of the runway, and only one approach end, which was the same as the only departure end. Trees blocked the other end, and the runup area (such as it was) was a paved-over graveyard – the headstones were preserved and set in the asphalt. A grave reminder (pun intended) of the seriousness of the impending activity.

I don't even remember the actual runway directions, but both the approach and departure crossed a pond about a half mile from the runway, which always provided a change in the air mass due to temperature differences on the surface. This mattered more on approaches, where no matter how good you thought you had set up your approach, you'd be off target after you crossed the pond.

I started my training in late October of 1986 and got my ticket on July 6 of 1987, 76 hours later. I was really in no hurry, as my instructor made the whole learning process very convenient for me. I worked for a small consulting firm in Marietta, and I traveled frequently to places like Dothan, AL, Baxley, GA, Aiken, SC, etc. None of these places were convenient to drive to, but they sure were great destinations for cross-country practice, so I almost immediately began taking advantage of private aircraft for business travel. 35 of my 76 hours when I took my checkride were cross-country.

My first personal cross country trip after I got the license was to see my extended family in Florida for a weekend of sports car racing. My oldest son, Joshua, then 6, went with me, and he was a great traveling companion. A couple of hours into the trip, in southern Georgia, he asked me when we would see the Florida border – to this day we are looking for the “welcome to Florida” signs.

I continued the use of my 150 for business travel all over the eastern US, charging the company only the car mileage rate and being quite content with the deal. About a year into this, my [small] company's lawyer decided to begin worrying about liability, and started examining the “dangers” of my airplane use. This was exacerbated by a Delta jet which “accidentally” landed at the wrong airport (Daniel Field instead of Bush Field) in Augusta, GA on a visual approach one night. My company president, probably on advice from the lawyer, asked me “what if you had been landing there (I often did) and hit the jet? – the lawsuits would put us out of business”. Though this is probably true (the lawsuits part) such a thing had never happened, and with the help of the AOPA staff we were able to convince the company that there was a safe and prudent way to use private aircraft for business travel. It happens that this safe and prudent practice included an instrument rating, so I set off to get one.

Shortly thereafter, I took another job and moved to Montgomery, AL, where I took up flying with the Civil Air Patrol to stay current and maybe be useful. An added benefit of this was membership in the Aero Club at Maxwell AFB, which turned out to be a great deal. My new instrument instructor was a hardened retired Colonel named Win DePoorter, who had over 600 Vietnam missions in F-4's, and nothing I or anyone else could do in a 172 could make this guy flinch. Summer IFR flying in the deep south, especially when penetrating the cumuli, is enough to make many folks give up then and

there, but Win's confident and thorough manners in actual IFR gave me a very solid foundation. A week after I got the instrument ticket, I flew a low-IFR cross-country trip to Atlanta, with a passenger, and never thought twice about whether I was ready. Win prepared me well. He also made good use of our training time, as one of our cross-country IFR trips was to Daytona for the 24-hour sports car race in February of 1990, with a turbo Lance full of crew for my brother's team.

I flew that Lance and an Arrow out of Maxwell until I moved to Colorado in 1992. Once, I got to fly them both on the same trip. In September of 1991, my grandfather succumbed to Parkinson's disease, while a brother of mine was racing near Thomasville, GA. I got in the Arrow and headed for Thomasville to get him, after which we intended to fly to Sarasota, FL for the funeral. On the way through the airspace around Columbus, GA, I noticed that my radios were getting noisy, but I was not savvy enough to pick up on the failed alternator until the radios were gone completely. By then I had the airport in sight, I dropped the gear and hoped that they were down (no juice, no green!), and set up for the landing. It was late afternoon and we were landing to the south, so a convenient shadow showed me the landing gear while I was still about 10 feet up – a great idea that I wished I'd thought of a few minutes earlier! A call to the Aero Club and they headed over to get me with the Lance and an alternator. I flew the Lance to FL while they fixed the Arrow and flew home. My instrument scan got better.

I learned a lot about business travel while living in Montgomery. I worked for the US EPA, and our government does indeed allow use of private aircraft for business travel, using airline "comparables" as the cost basis. So each trip required that I find and record a commercial airline "comparable" and turn it in with the expense report. Often I saved the EPA money, sometimes I ate a few dollars, and always I enjoyed the trip more. But my finance folks were certain that I was somehow cheating the government, and scowled at me every time they handed me an expense check.

Though I traveled less with the EPA than I had before, many of my most memorable "adventures" came while flying out of Montgomery. The first 2 of these came on the same trip, in an Aero Club 172. I'd read about a fuel management technique that called for switching tanks every 30 minutes until one runs dry, then [supposedly] knowing how much was left in the other to get you on the ground. On the first leg of this trip, we had a bit more headwind than expected and a bit more fuel burn than the book said, and the right tank went dry over the airport at Smith Mountain Lake, VA. I switched tanks, the fan came back on, and we landed without incident. I did not get nervous about it until the lineman told me that he'd never put that much gas in a 172 before – I think it was 40 gallons (the entire useable amount). I've not landed with less than 45 minutes of fuel remaining since that day in June of 1990.

The second leg of that trip took me to Martin State airport in Baltimore for some consulting work at Aberdeen Proving Ground. My boss (and close friend, Shawn) and my oldest son (Joshua) were with me, as later that week we were heading to Watkins Glen for another sports car race. While I worked at Aberdeen, Shawn showed Joshua around DC, and the following afternoon we met at Martin State to head to Elmira, NY.

Nervous about afternoon thunderstorms, I carefully checked the weather and radar at the walk-in FSS on the field, then confidently headed for the airplane. 30 minutes later, northwest-bound and climbing through 5000' in a cloud, I turned to Shawn to remark about the smooth, white, ideal IFR cloud we were in. Less than 30 seconds later, the 172 was all over the sky, the cloud was black, and Joshua was screaming in the back. The bright flashes nearby looked remarkably like lightning, and I had this feeling I should be somewhere else. I turned left and began a descent – or thought I did. Nose down, power off, airspeed top of the green, going up at 500 fpm, plus or minus about 1000 fpm! Somewhere along the way I called the controller and told him what I was doing, and he told me not to – there weren't any thunderstorms out there and I needed to stay on course. 2 minutes later I was in the clear, westbound at 4000', and glad to still be breathing. Shawn said "nice cloud". Joshua needed new underwear. In the next ten minutes, every major airport from Baltimore to New York closed due to a line of thunderstorms that appeared "out of nowhere". Airliners were stacked up for hours while I flew much too far west before I decided to head north to Elmira. We got there an hour late, worked all night on the race cars, then started a 24-hour race at 10am on Saturday. To finish the weekend right, I got sick from something I ate at 2 in the morning, and woke up on Sunday morning (on a cot behind the pits) to a TNN camera in my face. I looked awful (worse than usual) but they used the shot as part of the introduction to the tape-delayed broadcast. Ugh. The flight home was uneventful, but we had a lifetime of memories from one little week.

The next "adventure" was much more benign, but not much less memorable. I had EPA business in Princeton, NJ, in late August of the same year. We'd had countless days near 100 degrees with humidity to match, and any chance to go north seemed to be worth taking. We'd had no relief from rain, grass crackled when you walked on it, and anything had to be better than this! As departure day came, there was a stationary front from northern AL to Maine, so shortly after takeoff I entered the soup and stayed there for 6.5 hours, with a fuel (and bladder!) stop in Hazard, KY. As I recall (probably not accurately), there was not a single bump in the clouds all the way to NJ. The Arrow was pretty well equipped, and I flew the RNAV approach with the coupled AP into Princeton. I got out of the airplane onto the ramp at Princeton to low clouds, a light drizzle, lush green vegetation, and 65 degrees! New Jersey or not, I thought I was in Heaven. The weather stayed like that for the 3 days I was there, and I really, really did not want to go back to Montgomery. My logbook records my first visit to Knoxville's Downtown Island airport on that return trip.

As it turns out, there's some serendipity in flying as well. In February of 1989 I had an opportunity to do some consulting for the Savannah River Site, a place I had worked frequently for my previous employer (the one with the worries about Daniel Field and errant Delta jets). This previous employer, still a friend, was the prime contractor for the job, and we had a meeting to attend in Augusta, GA in advance of the project. I picked him up in the Arrow and we flew, mostly IMC, into Daniel Field. Yes, he noticed, and yes, he was diligently searching the skies for 767's. It was his first general aviation flight, and after I got him safely home the next day, with a round trip time 6 hours faster than driving, he was a believer.

We flew quite a bit together after that, including into Detroit in February of 1992 in a snowstorm that subsequently shut down the city for days. When time came to go home, we didn't need an airport map to get around Detroit Metro – we just followed the taxiways wherever they led, with 4 foot berms of snow on either side. The snowstorm was followed by a cold front, and the Lance really did not want to start in the -10 degree air (even though it spent the night in a hangar). It was probably the 5th try before it kept running, and I cannot say that my passengers were all that confident about our departure. We warmed up the plane for about 20 minutes before departing.

My youngest son, Jordan, was born on July 10, 1990 – he was due on the 6th. This was fine with us, except we'd gotten in the habit of being in Branford, FL on July 4th holidays to enjoy the very nice small-town celebrations they held. Branford was home to my wife's grandparents, and late into their lives they still participated in the morning 5k footrace and other holiday activities. With her doctor's permission, observing that we were only 2 hours from Montgomery, we took the Lance to Branford and Jordan patiently waited for our scheduled return.

In July of '91, I took a couple of weeks off and went to see my folks in Sarasota. My brother Andy got his first GA flight as we went to Daytona for the Pepsi 400 (watching, not working), then a little IMC time coming home in the normal FL afternoon buildups. I think he changed color a few times, but was back to normal quickly and never complained. This is the same brother that I picked up for the funeral 2 months later, so I guess he was OK with his first trip.

While I was on that vacation, my pastor in Montgomery called and asked me if I would speak on Sunday morning, as he had to leave town on short notice. I agreed and headed for home, without my family, on Saturday evening. I got as far as Dothan, where I landed to check out the fabulous light show I was seeing to the north. Sure enough, there was a massive line of storms about 200 miles wide blocking my path, and just as importantly, parked over Montgomery. I slept (barely) in the Lance that night and flew home early in the morning. I have no idea what I said at church that morning, and probably no one else does either.

A few days later, I learned how short a 2700' runway can really be (Maxwell's runway was a complacency-inducing 8000'). I flew into College Park, MD, then the oldest continuously operating airport in the US, with family and friends for a meeting in DC. After a really nice aerial tour of DC (except for the July haze), we put the Lance down over the RR tracks and braked our way all the way to the end of the runway, with the restaurant patrons watching through the huge plate glass windows and wondering whether they'd get to see another plane head off into the trees (no, the FBO did not tell me that it was common practice to do so when I called ahead). I made the mistake of letting the lineman fill up the plane, not thinking then that the short landing space made also for a short takeoff space. Oops. When I called back to ask them to take some fuel out, I was told they had no way to do so. One of my passengers was going off to visit family, so that saved me about 200 pounds, and study of the flight manual assured me

that 2700' was plenty to clear a 50' obstacle (trees one end, elevated RR tracks the other), but that did not take away the nervousness. Using the best short-field technique I could muster, we cleared the tracks with plenty of room, but my legs shook until we stopped in Manassas, VA to pick up my other traveling companion. Another lesson learned – think before you fill up.

My last Montgomery story, at least for now, was the opportunity to take a Russian exchange student for a local flight. Though 3 years after the fall of communism, Gera had no idea that such personal freedoms could exist. He was shocked that we could fly at all, let alone out of an Air Force base. He was mesmerized by every facet of our trip, but mostly he was in genuine awe of that kind of freedom. I guess we should be too.

New adventures awaited after I moved to Colorado in February of 1992, but they had to wait a bit. I was too busy at my new job to worry about flying, but the gorgeous May weather finally compelled me to make time. I got checked out in a well-used turbo 210, and followed the checkout with a day-long mountain-flying exercise made mandatory by the FBO. The very accommodating instructor let me bring my two older boys with me, and we had a long but amazing day flying from Ft. Collins to Leadville (9927' MSL), Aspen (7820' MSL, one way in with mountains all around), Kremmling, and Steamboat Springs (6878' MSL, but on its own plateau and only 4400' of runway). We crossed the front range mountains twice and flew into some of the trickiest airports in the US. There is no better way to see Colorado and get an understanding of mountain winds and density altitude than this. A few days later I got checked out in a nice Cardinal RG, which was owned by my boss, at the airport located ½ mile from my lab. I think I was in the right place.

The Cardinal got me my first look at ice on the wings, when I headed for Santa Fe in late October with a two colleagues. The trip was mostly VMC, but a small buildup near Colorado Springs was full of very wet and cold air. The ice accumulated quickly so I asked for and received an approach and landing at COS. Though the air on the ground was 70 degrees, there was enough ice that it took about 10 minutes to melt. We spent the night in the 'Springs, because the cloud turned into a right nice thunderstorm which sat over the town for hours.

The 210 got me my first real look at winter flying, as I had a meeting to attend (again with a colleague) in Couer d'Alane, ID, in January of '93. It looked like a great afternoon flight up through Billings, MT (for gas and a stretch) and on in to Couer d'Alane by early evening. The forecast was for VFR conditions the whole way, but about 2 hours east of the destination we found ourselves in IMC with light snow. None of the snow was sticking, so we pressed on and ended up #2 for the approach into COE. The controller advised that the previous aircraft had missed, so I was ready for that, and when the 310 in front of me missed the approach, I asked for a change of destination to Spokane, where they had an ILS and much more forgiving terrain. The weather was not much worse, but it was now dark and the surface winds were pretty strong. We flew the ILS Runway 21, with the winds reported as 230 at 25. I had a little ice on the wings, but the plane flew

fine and the ice was melting quickly below the clouds, about 1000' AGL. I landed, then immediately the airplane turned left and started to skid toward the grass. All the right rudder I had could not get me back on the centerline, so I added power and went around – back into the soup and ice for another ILS. Not the ideal conditions, but better than wrapping myself around a hangar. The tower came back and said oops, sorry, we meant 290 at 25! On the next landing, I started on the right side of the runway just in case, and after a few applications of the right brake only, found I could control the plane on the ground. It turns out that the left brake was dragging, and combined with a strong right crosswind, was too much for me to handle on the first try. We finally got parked, and I carried my all-too-cool passenger across an ice-covered ramp to the FBO's terminal. Yes, carried - Jodie had broken her foot the day before our trip, and the ramp was too treacherous for her crutches. All was amended on our trip home, a beautiful VFR day with a 25 knot tailwind and 300 mile visibility. We stopped at Jackson Hole for lunch on the way, and could see the mountains west of Ft. Collins immediately after we turned east from Jackson. We were on the ground 2 hours later!

My logbook suggests that most of my flying in Colorado was uneventful, but very productive. We had major clients in Idaho Falls, ID, and Los Alamos, NM, that I visited frequently in the Cardinal or 210. Someone in my company adopted yet another no-fly policy, but my boss (the Cardinal owner) had a useful habit of selective memo-reading, especially when it came to flying and other efficient business practices. Phil is still a good friend of mine, but he sold the Cardinal a couple of years after I moved back east. I saw it on the ramp in Merritt Island, FL in January of 1999, and left a note on the windscreen for the new owner.

I left Ft. Collins for Florida in 1995 (yes, I know – what was I thinking?) – it was the hardest thing I'd ever done. Though there were more than a few good reasons to do so, I'd never before been homesick for any of the many places I'd lived. The experience of homesickness was new and terrible, and the job I moved for was a big mistake, but some of the people about to enter my life were worth every bad moment. Shortly after I moved, I found a 210 and a 177 RG at GNV and got checked out in them, mostly to stay current (I didn't) and make the occasional business or family trip. Through a local businessman who later became mayor, I met a number of very active entrepreneurs, many of whom were also airplane owners. Often, these businessmen could afford the [nice] airplanes but did not have time to stay adequately current, so engaged the services of local flight instructors to do the flying for them. Over time, I became close to one such airplane owner, who had a nice turbo 210 in a private hangar in a fly-in community, Canon Creek Airpark in Lake City, FL. When his 'regular' pilot moved on to fly full time for UF, I was made an offer I could not refuse: do some flying for him in exchange for like time in the 210 – I just buy the gas for the time I use it. I was now free-lance consulting, so fairly free to set my own schedule and I jumped on the opportunity. I flew Marshall and his colleagues all over the southeast in 'Betsy', mostly out and back on the same day, and often leaving me somewhere I could go drum up work for myself. This offered me the opportunity for truly frequent flying, typically 6 to 10 hours per week, in all weather, and all times of day and night. The biggest challenges included the lack of an instrument approach into Canon Creek, poor lighting on the short, narrow runway, and

occasionally, having to work after getting home at 3 am. At the same time, my brother Eric's auto racing was going well, and he needed some extra help that I was now equipped to bring him on weekends. After about 2 years of this, Marshall decided he needed a twin and asked me to get a multi-engine rating, which I did in a 310. He then made me another offer which I could not refuse – a 'deal' on the 210 he needed to sell to make way for his upcoming twin. Marshall not only gave me a great deal on a very nice and well-known airplane, he called the president of the local bank and told him I was good for the loan I needed. AOPA and the Cessna Pilots Association stepped in with some very good pre-buy advice, and I ran every test and check we could collectively think of, even though I thought the plane was in good shape. 'Betsy' passed with flying colors, and I was a 210 owner in a matter of weeks. In order to keep the finances in order, I formed a Chapter S corporation to own the plane, and Caribbean Bound, Inc. was born. I leased the plane from my corporation when I used it, and had a legitimate way to generate invoices to bill my clients for travel expenses. I also now had my very own 'aluminum mistress', so designated by my A&P.

'Betsy' taught me a lot, and has created a logbook full of priceless memories. I had a hand in all of her maintenance for 5 years, including annuals, a new engine, one set of cylinders, paint on the nose and horizontal stabilizer, GPS installation, and boatloads of routine maintenance. We (me, the family, my brothers and the race team, or Marshall and his associates) took 'Betsy' from Florida to Washington and Arizona to Massachusetts. Included in the trips were aerial tours of Mount Rushmore, a fly-in tour of the Boeing plant in Seattle, dozens of trips into Hartsfield in Atlanta, several trips to Indy with all of my sons and/or my brothers and friends for the Formula One races, Oshkosh in '99 with 2 of my sons and my brother-in-law Craig, also a pilot, Boston for the 2000 Marathon (which I qualified for when we flew to Tucson for their marathon in '99), and countless trips to Colorado to feed my still-homesick heart. Going to Colorado was never very fast, but we frequently flew home at 17,000' with average groundspeeds over 200 knots. There's nothing quite like a turbo in wintertime!

I did most of my 9 marathons with a good friend, Bob Jump, from Ft. Collins, though we never ran a marathon together in Colorado, and Bob never flew to a marathon with me. In fact, he only flew with me on one trip, from Ft. Collins to Colorado Springs and back for the 2000 Pike's Peak Ascent half-marathon. The trip down was fine, but a hot, bumpy ride home after a hard run did not agree with Bob. Being an incredibly self-disciplined guy, Bob did not get sick until we were on the ground and parked and he was out of the airplane. The logbook reveals that my youngest son, Jordan, often suffered a similar effect in the last hour or so of our numerous trips to CO, when the air was usually bumpy and the trip prolonged by strong headwinds – Jordan always managed to corral his cookies, too. Bob is now in Los Alamos, a place I visit frequently, and is entered in this year's New York Marathon.

Somewhere along the way I got a real job again, and in September of 2000 we moved to Oak Ridge, TN. I had been working for an Oak Ridge company for some time, but wanted to make sure it was really right before we moved again. I found a hangar in Rockwood, TN, about 30 minutes west of Oak Ridge, on the east end of the Cumberland

Plateau. An underused airport with a 5000' runway and an instrument approach, it was a good home for 'Betsy' and I for over 3 years. Rockwood is also home to the worst weather in the south, as far as I can tell. I was flying home from Chicago one afternoon and called flight service for a weather update, using Crossville as the nearest reporting station. The specialist told me that I didn't want to go to Crossville, they had the worst weather in the US! I corrected him and told him that Rockwood did not have a reporting station, else he would have known better. In any case, I've missed more approaches into RKW than into all the other airports I've flown into put together. When the weather in east TN is IFR, don't bother trying to get into RKW.

'Betsy' and I had plenty of meetings with weather, but I finally had a little help in the form of a Stormscope. The Stormscope didn't help much with our most serious weather encounter, however, when I drove from Knoxville to Gainesville, FL to retrieve the 210 on the weekend of our move to TN. I beat Hurricane Gordon to GNV by about 30 minutes, but the rain had been pelting poor 'Betsy' for days, and something in the tailcone got wet. About 300' AGL on climbout, I turned on the AP and found out what a runaway (up!) trim feels like. I turned off the autopilot and managed to hand-fly through rough IMC for about 45 minutes, then cruised to my new home with a nice push from Gordon. I flew about 30 hours while King fixed the black boxes, including several low ILS's, anxiously awaiting the return of my coupled approaches. Boy was I spoiled.

Somewhere in that time frame, my brother's successful sports car career racing Toyota's took a left turn – literally. Toyota was interested in going stock-car racing, and NASCAR told them that the road to the top started at the bottom – in their Goody's Dash series. So Van Cleef Racing and Toyota built a Dash car, with a carbureted (!) V-6 powerplant according to NASCAR's specifications, and off we went. Our family has always been blessed with good friends who were willing to work exceptionally hard for no reward except cuts and bruises and sleep deprivation, and we took good advantage of them as we entered the Dash series. My logbook shows 'Betsy' zigzagging her way all over the south to pick up crew, get them to Daytona or Darlington or Hickory or some such place, then get them back home or wherever they needed to be next. One such trip had me dropping off Eric's wife and son in Hunstville, AL, my brothers Andy and Alan in Venice, FL, and my son Daniel and I returning to Canon Creek at daybreak. I guess it was a long night. The logbook also shows numerous ILS approaches to low conditions at relatively small airports – they all had ILS's because they served NASCAR teams. For that part, it was a pretty good deal.

My 'real' job required some international travel, and I discovered that if you are flying internationally, and want to fly into ATL to start the trip, you can park your airplane there cheaper than you can park a car – just buy some gas from Mercury, let them take you to and from the terminal, and park for about \$7.00 per day. Too good not to do!

I also discovered that big thunderstorms at night can be very deceptive. After one particularly long day in Oak Ridge, I headed to Florida in 'Betsy'. As I was passing Atlanta to my right on my normal route over Athens, I looked south and observed an amazing light show from a wide line of storms, apparently in my path, which I had no

intention of penetrating. The Stormscope was blank, but who could believe a black box anyway? I called flight service to check on the storms, and was told they'd be no factor to me. After all, I was headed to Lake City, and these storms were in Gainesville moving south. The Stormscope was black because the storms were 100 miles out of range! Those are my favorite kind of thunderstorms.

One of the great joys of airplane ownership has been sharing the privilege and experience. On several occasions, I've let friends or coworkers do some of the flying, or just showed them the wonderful efficiency of flying to the town you are going to work in. I've handed out dozens of AOPA's First Flight Certificates, though not all without some measure of drama. The man who is now my business' VP flew with me on a very productive round-robin from Knoxville to Boston to Morristown, NJ and home, only to be told by his wife that he could not do it any more – she was too nervous while he was gone. He framed his First (and apparently last) Flight certificate and displays it in his office.

Betsy gave me a good excuse to do many things I'd always wanted to do. Ornerly guy that I am notwithstanding, I always got satisfaction from doing things for others. The brother of 'Betsy's former owner, Bruce, who was an outstanding mentor and beloved friend to me and my family, once suggested I get hooked up with some form of charity flying organization. It was a great idea - shortly before I moved to TN, I got hooked up with an outfit called Angel Flight, providing non-emergency medical transportation for those in need. I don't think there's a better feeling, or a better use of one's flying privilege, than bringing home a family member who's been away for months, or saving a cancer patient an 8 hour drive with a 1.5 hour airplane flight. This point was brought home to me in a very poignant way in February of 2001. I flew a young man home from Birmingham, AL to Tri Cities, TN, after he'd been in heart treatment and therapy for a rare virus contracted in the late summer of 2000. He had a huge welcoming committee at the airport, and apparently my son Jordan and I were as good as family, as we got hugged by the entire crowd. The miracle of the trip is that we made it at all – it's really hard to fly and navigate through tear-filled eyes; this young man had overcome the virus that had killed my dear friend Bruce just 2 month earlier.

I had also always wanted to make the small jump over the water to the Bahamas, and finally decided to do so for our 25th wedding anniversary in January of 2003. After looking and asking around, we settled on Walker's Cay in the western part of the Abacos chain, with no telephone, no cell phone coverage, and no computer connections. My wife's folks, near Gainesville, GA, agreed to watch Jordan for us over the weekend, and we were set to leave on Thursday afternoon. By noon that day, most of the area had accumulated about an inch of snow, which surely meant that Rockwood had 3 inches. I called the airport manager who said he was about to close up, but that there was little accumulation thus far. Putting our plans in fast-forward, I called flight service to confirm that there were clear skies above the low snow-makers, and we took off into an intensifying storm which would end up shutting down the area by Friday. The stop in Gainesville was also in wintery weather, so rather than spend the night there before we headed to Walker's, we continued to Port Charlotte, FL, and visited with my folks for the

evening. Walker's was a wonderful place, the trip there was uneventful, the people exceedingly friendly, the absence of phone and computer exquisite. I've heard that the small, private island was badly damaged in the 2004 hurricane season, but I have had no confirmation of that. The eye of Hurricane Charley, which destroyed much of Port Charlotte in 2004, missed my folks house by about 5 miles – they had no damage at all; truly a miracle.

Sometimes the interesting stories came about during maintenance activities, not flying. One weekend afternoon 'Betsy' needed an oil change, so I put on my grubby clothes, grabbed Jordan to get him out of the house, and headed for RKW. While we were there, our new Governor flew in, and made a point of introducing himself to Jordan. He was apparently smart enough to avoid the possibility of shaking my oil-covered hand, as he took the other exit route off the tarmac.

Going back a bit, I'll comment again that Colorado was good to me. In addition to having a lab in an airport business park, I was blessed with some outstanding relationships in Ft. Collins. Two generations of the Workman family made us feel more like we were home than anywhere we'd been before. The Workmans loved life outdoors in Colorado, and taught me to do so also. Steve was the cyclist who encouraged (and whipped) me into a love for hard, tough rides, and Jon frequently took me out for some good running abuse. Jon had apparent allergies to many common substances, and constantly struggled with endurance, but through sheer perseverance and will maintained a very high level of fitness. His illness was finally diagnosed as liver failure, after we'd left Ft. Collins, but his relatively good health kept him off the priority transplant list. When they found cancer in his liver in 2001, they finally started the transplant process, only to find that the cancer had spread into his lymph system. His chemotherapy nearly killed him, but he persevered and was committed to resuming an athletic lifestyle. Though by then I was living in TN, I visited him frequently in Colorado. As encouragement for his intended return to athletics, I told him I would join him in an arduous 88 mile bicycle race in western Colorado as soon as he was ready. In May of 2003, I had the pleasure of racing the Elam Classic with Jon and his two brothers, Steve and Kim, and Jon and I had a great trip from Ft. Collins to Grand Junction and back in my trusty 210 on consecutive gorgeous Colorado days. Jon is now as healthy as he has been in 20 years and a real factor in masters bicycle racing in Colorado – and Steve took Best All-Around Rider in CO this year.

Sadly, my 'Betsy' era is over, as my company decided in 2002 that private flying was outside their risk-averse business style. They graciously gave me a year to break the habit, and I flew my last business flight for them on October 30, 2003 (I think that was the day their old insurance policy expired). I flew a couple more Angel Flights with 'Betsy' shortly thereafter, then sold her to a self-employed Dallas businessman who has made good use of her and made her better than ever. He has kindly kept me informed of her condition, and I have prayed for his safety.

As I look back over these stories, there is a clear theme that strikes me – most of them would not be stories at all if I had not had the opportunity to share my flying with others.

After all, the logbook does not lie, and it says that it's not about me, or even the airplane, but it's about the people I've been able to share this with. What a deal.

So, what's the upside of my airplane-less-ness? I've made some new friends, flown some new planes, and found some new examples of graciousness in the cockpit and around the town. Through my friend and co-worker Thad Philips, I've come to know Buz Witherington a bit, and found (as you will if you meet them) two amazing men whose style and mannerisms cannot help but inspire you to be better. Thanks, Thad, and thanks, Buz, for being a part of the next chapter in my collection of flying stories.