

EAA CHAPTER 1128

Two Harbors Helgeson Airport

www.1128.eaachapterorg

The ice has finally left my pretty little lake. All the usual spring travelers are dropping in on their way north. I see mergansers, bufflehead and goldeneye practicing their mating dances. Wood ducks bob and mallards joust for the favor of the finest female. Most impressive of all are the Trumpeter Swans. Always in pairs their regal bearing and massive stature command attention. The loon couple that owns this lake will be along soon and the exotic visitors will continue northward but I am grateful for their spectacular presence. You and I have a unique insight into the life of these magnificent birds for we have flown the same skies and experienced the beauty of their higher perspective.

Our next meeting will be on **Thursday, May 5 at 6:30** in the cozy **Community Room at THHS.**

Last Meeting

Our April meeting had all the familiar elements: conversation about flying in general and the inside skinny on doings at our favorite airport. Seth ran the Chapter Video from HQ and a couple of "Hints for Homebuilders". I would be more specific but I wasn't there. I was at an even bigger gathering of aviation nuts in sunny Florida.

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Chapter 272 will be giving airplane rides to students of the Duluth Aviation Institute on March 14 at Duluth International. Cirrus will provide the space. Your help would be welcomed by them and rewarding for you.

Chapter 1221 members are taking the skis off of their birds for the brief period of tough sledding coming up.

Etc.

It was a bucket list thing. Jim and I had tried to fly to Sun-n-Fun in the airplane we built but our best efforts were foiled by the worst weather. This year we decided to bite the bullet and drive there. "Six days of driving for a five day show" was Jim's quip. But the drudgery was so worth it. Lakeland Florida is delightful in April with sunny skies and temps reaching 80 nearly every day. The show was a laid back version of Airventure and the people were absolutely fantastic. Like the family reunion we experience at Oshkosh we were accepted with kindness and generosity even though we hadn't met before.

Well, we had met one pilot before. Vern is a frequent visitor to our bivouac at Oshkosh and always entertains us with his stories. I'll admit raising an eyebrow a time or two when he talked like he was best buddies with the biggest names in our small sport. Well, it turns out Vern wasn't lying, he wasn't even exaggerating! SUN-n-FUN is his home show and he knows everybody. Paradise City is the grass strip equivalent to Beagle Field at Oshkosh and Vern is the Mayor of Paradise City. The first airplane launched every morning from the lush grass was Vern's well worn Drifter.

Ancestor to the Lockwood Air Cam the Drifter is a two seat tandem open air ultra light and it flew all day. Every take off saw a new face in the passenger seat with a thousand watt smile. Many of the vendors gave demonstration flights hoping to make a sale but Vern wasn't selling anything, he was just giving joy. With thick blonde hair like a halo around his helmet he waved and shouted at the crowd and clearly was getting as much joy as he gave. I wished I had Fifi with me to join him in the warm sky because I was sure he would be too busy to give me a ride but I was wrong again. On the first day of the show as the afternoon airshow was winding up on the main runway the Jagillac eased into our camp.

Picture a golf cart with a 1949 Cadillac hood, a Jaguar hood ornament and a love seat on the back, that's Vern's ride on the ground. He cocked his head and said, "I'm getting ready to go fly again, if you want to go you better get over to the fence." and scooted off. I ditched my swim trunks and sandals for shorts and tennies and jogged over, Jim right behind. By the time I hopped over the fence the Drifter was fueled and ready to go. Vern got me aboard and secured with well practiced ease and as we taxied he filled me in on his bird and the rules for the show pattern. The flagger had been giving elaborate hand signals to departing pilots but when Vern taxied up he just nodded. In a flash we were off and climbing past the bleachers. Vern pumped both fists in the air and gave the crowd a war-whoop.

Minnesota is famous for her lakes but Florida has a lot more wet ground. Scenic ponds, puddles and waterways dot, surround and bisect acres of green grass and fruit trees. The old ComTronics helmets we wore never went silent as my pilot kept up a running commentary on what we were seeing, what we were doing and the meaning of life. He gave me the controls for a bit and it reminded me of flying the Dragonfly from the back seat. Unlike the ultralight pattern at Oshkosh pilots here are allowed to make a pass over the runway so we did. After a very generous tour Vern turned final for landing but didn't seem to be descending. I thought we were making another pass until I felt the Drifter twist into a giant forward slip. We came down like a rock and he didn't kick out the slip until the wheels were almost on the ground. Delightful! Jim got the next ride and came down just as tickled as I was. I think pilots in general tend to be intelligent, clever, even exceptional people and I have been fortunate to connect with many who were all that and more. Vern is right up there on that list.

The rest of the week was filled with highlights which we probably enjoyed even more due to Vern's kindness. I fell in love with a cute little flying boat that was for sale at a crazy low price and snagged a demo flight on Saturday. Turns out the demo pilot was a former tug pilot and we had many friends in common. The aviation community is a small, cool world. In the end I had to admit that even a crazy low price was out of my reach but the fantasy stays with me still.

The Saturday night airshow was outrageous and on Sunday morning we broke camp. The 40 year old tent Jim had endured all week went in the dumpster and everything else went back in the minivan. Neither of us wanted to get back on I-75 so we plotted a course up the Gulf coast. When we finally cleared the worlds longest strip mall the driving was much more sane than the worlds busiest freeway and Alabama was a lovely piece of cake. We didn't have to put on long pants until the end of the second long day of driving. My sunburn seemed incongruous when I arrived home Tuesday night and had to shovel snow to get in the house. Was it all a dream? No, it was very real but it will replay in my dreams for a long time and I'm really glad I got this big check mark on my bucket list. It didn't come without effort or expense but it was surely worth it. Whether you have a list or not I urge you to break your daily routine for something special from time to time. A life is not defined by time served surviving, it is colored by the moments of unconventional antics you manage to work in between the mundane.

.....Happy Landings!.....

