

EAA CHAPTER 1128

It's snowing at the lake tonight and I love it. My little corner of heaven has had a light snow cover all winter but my ski trails are getting ratty. There is an element of flight in cross country skiing, gliding smoothly over rolling terrain without a care. Maybe that's why I like it so much. Our next meeting will be on **Thursday, March 1st at 6:30** in the cozy pilot's lounge at **Two Harbors Helgeson Municipal Airport**.

LAST MEETING

Bill had coffee and treats ready as usual. He has done this job so well for so long I think we have come to take it for granted. Allow me to represent the whole gang and say, "Thank you, Bill!"

For the first time in ages there were more people than chairs so some sat on tables and some stood. Since there were new faces Mike asked us all to introduce ourselves, it's always great meeting kindred spirits. Bill said he had paid this year's insurance premium to EAA headquarters and reported a balance of \$855.92 in chapter coffers. Mike told us that Barb Anderson had renewed her membership and made a cash donation to the chapter. I mentioned that Dan Anderson's memorial at Oshkosh will be dedicated on July 29th, 11:00 a.m. Brett said our presentation at the High School had gone well and we went over the plan for the next day's Duluth Airport tour. A discussion ensued about our next step in the mentoring process.

Mike gave us a comprehensive report on his experience at the Leadership Seminar in Oshkosh. He was excited about the abundance of information and guidance he had received sipping from the firehose. He also got to chat with Paul Poberezny and see his 'Founder's Wing' full of EAA history.

Seth told us about his work with the city council on a number of issues including a plan for a new commercial hangar and potential personal hangars with amenities. It's great to have such a tireless advocate for our airport inside the political system.

There wasn't as much casual hangar flying as usual and I think it was because we all had the feeling we were doing some important work. Great meeting.

ETC.

The next day we took the kids for the big tour and we all had a good time. The production line at Cirrus runs ten hours a day from Monday through Thursday so the factory was quiet that Friday but bursting with potential energy. We walked through the whole process from fuselage and wing shells arriving from the North Dakota plant all the way to finished airplane and it was amazing. Next we visited the Monoco Air FBO and talked with their A/P mechanics at length. The kids had some good questions. Our last stop was at the Lake Superior College facility in the control tower building. The kids got to fly the simulators and take a tour of the air traffic control system. They sat in real airplanes and helicopters out on the ramp and opened their imaginations. How cool! Matt bought pizza for the whole crowd and we watched some great videos while we ate. I hope the students had as much fun as I did.

All the northern lights activity lately reminded me of a flying story my father told me a long time ago. Ernie started flying as a young man in 1935 with Lindberg's epic flight a very recent memory. The few fledgling airlines at the time were just trading in Ford Trimotors for the shiny new DC-3 but dad didn't aspire to an airline cockpit, he just wanted to fly. His logbook speaks of many short instruction flights snatched as opportunity allowed after a full day's work.

The trainer was an American Eagle open cockpit biplane with a five cylinder Kinner radial engine perched on a long nose. As time went on he also flew Taylor cubs, Piper cubs, an Aeronca and a Waco 'F' that he told me was the sweetest flying machine of them all. His first solo however, and several log pages of 'Solo Practice' were in the American Eagle so I assume that was the airplane involved in this story. Ernie graduated to angel wings forty years ago so I can't check my facts.

On a crisp December evening he pulled chocks and rolled onto the grass runway at Twin Lakes airport in Robbinsdale, a suburb of Minneapolis. The firm air saw him off and climbing in short order and the flying wires sang their song. The low frequency throb of the Kinner engine was transmitted through the instrument-quality-spruce airframe right into his bones. It felt good. Reaching an acceptable cruise altitude he swung the Eagle's nose away from the city lights to the dark north. The horizon was clearly visible and that was not right. He lifted his goggles and wiped his eyes but the image didn't go away, in fact it got brighter. A seafoam green glow began to rise and twist against the jet black sky until it completely filled his field of view. The sinuous motion and soft light seduced him and he flew on. He wanted more than anything to penetrate the veil and experience the embrace of heaven. Time stopped. When he was finally able to pull his concentration away from the spectacle he was not sure how far he had traveled or if he was even right side up. He knew he should turn away from the siren but could not bring himself to do it. Finally the 'Bull-headed Swede', as he liked to call himself, took control and swung the Eagle around. Ground lights were few and far between in the middle of the Great Depression but eventually he made out the glow of Minneapolis and set a course. He became aware of the cold night air as if he had just stepped outside. The euphoria ebbed and he realized fuel could become a factor but every glance over his shoulder brought a big smile to his cold face. When the big biplane rolled her wheels onto home turf and the Kinner clattered to a stop the pilot just sat still for a while and absorbed what he had seen. Common aurora borealis which he had witnessed many times from the ground seemed to become a living creature that spoke to his soul and he heard the message.

Decades passed before he told me the story but I could still see the spark in his clear, blue eyes as he lived it yet again. Ernie, as most men of the 'Greatest Generation' was not given to emotional expression and I remember feeling so fortunate that he shared his feelings with me. I was maybe eight, nine years old and I decided right then, "I wanna do that!" Thanks dad.

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