

RANDOM DIARY

It seems like it has been raining for a month. Raining and cold and miserable. On Thursday the sun poked around the clouds enough for me to start mowing lawns at Bob's Cabins. The grass was overgrown and the ground was wet but at least I didn't have to wear a jacket. This kind of work doesn't involve a lot of brain activity so I drifted through my mental Ipod and found some classic tunes to hum over the earplug-muted racket of the mower. As usual my eyes were on the sky and the clouds were thinning. The big lake was as flat as a pool table as well so I allowed myself to dream about an after work flight. The work day zoomed by.

Bob's Cabins is only an air mile from the airport, maybe four miles by road. I was still brushing grass clippings off of my jeans when I stepped onto the tarmac and walked into the Roy LaBounty admin building to check the weather computers. The wind was seven knots from the southeast and the temperature was 58, perfect. No precipitation within 500 miles, perfect. I used the phone to check my answering machine at home and found no messages, perfect. Then the guilt hit me. It was more than a year ago when Dan asked me to sell his Kitfox and though I had been working on it, I had not accomplished the goal.

I probably should have been Catholic, guilt hits me like a brick. I phoned the prospective buyer and left a message saying I would be pulling cowls and opening inspection panels for the annual inspection now past due. Then I drove over to Dan's hangar and did the work. After an hour I heard a car pull up but it was not my buyer, it was my hangar-mate Steve Merrill. Steve was feeling the same tug that had been pulling at me all day.

"It's been raining forever! I gotta fly!"

That's all I needed to hear, I put my tools away and closed the hangar door. Steve was already pulling Miss Chaos out when I drove up to hangar 34. He has to move my girl to get his girl out but she's light and no bother to him. I knew that I needed to change the carburetor jet for the warmer weather so I popped her cowl and gave her a good looking over since I was in there anyway. Steve was just starting to taxi his Citabria as I buttoned up Miss Chaos and gave her a thorough pre-flight.

Now the windsock was almost limp and the clouds were all gone, perfect! Steve's orange Citabria, brilliantly lit by the lowering sun was just taking off as I slid down into my cockpit and got comfortable. Miss Chaos was as anxious as I was, three shots of prime and one yank on the starter and she settled into a contented purr. We did the taildragger swagger with practiced confidence and I began to smile. The smile spread to a grin when, after my final checks I pushed the throttle all the way forward and let her go. Just as her main wheels got light she dropped the right, then the left in a little tap dance of joy and we were gone. She ate the sky as if she were starving and I just hung on, my attitude soaring with the altitude. We had 700 feet as we reached the crossing runway so I let her nose drop a little and snapped into a 90 degree bank towards the big lake. She used the 'G' force to give me a hug. Leveling the wings we agreed to a nice, polite climb until we were outside of the traffic pattern but we were secretly winking at each other like newlyweds, knowing the thrills to come.

Tracking towards the lake we couldn't resist a steep 360 over Matt and Ann's house and after that I couldn't keep her shiny side up. Miss Chaos is like one of the pros on 'Dancing with the Stars', even if you have two left feet, she makes you feel like Fred Astaire. And Oh how we danced! I let her drift out over the lake as we headed towards Knife River because we sometimes get a little low when we fool around. Not dangerous low but on the edge of FAA regulation low and we wouldn't want to infract a federal rule. Over the lake we have only to stay 500 feet away from anything man made and we are golden.

Cranking a tight 180 at Knife River put the sun at my back and the view was astounding! For the first time in weeks the air was dry and it was so dry I could easily make out details on the Wisconsin shore. Ten miles out an ore boat throbbed steadily down lake trailing a stationary smoke

rope behind it's stack. The terrain around me was 1080i, Hi-Def 3D and the colors just jumped into the cockpit.

The north shore snaked away to the horizon and beckoned us to follow. So we did, wheeling and darting through the butter-smooth air like a swallow after a bug. Bob's cabins did a pirouette on the tip of the left wing as the sun swept through the spinning cockpit. Continuing up the shore we gave a salute to the Two Harbors Lighthouse and the city campgrounds before turning inland over the golf course. I picked a heading that would shade my eyes with the canopy bow and we charged into the sun back to the airport, as close to straight and level as we ever get. The windsock was still dead and there were no deer on the grass runway so we pulled the pattern in tight and shot three landings in about five minutes. I like to stay high on the base leg so Miss Chaos can show her slip turning to final approach. She's such a tease!

It's hard to believe we have been dancing together for ten years now, I remember when she was just a big plywood box full of tubes. I kissed her spinner and floated to my van on the sweet river of love.

Back at Marble Lake I was enjoying the sunset from my deck when my peripheral vision caught a large bird swooping from the top of one birch to the lower trunk of another. It took my old brain a moment to process the information but when I finally focused on the landing spot what I saw was not a bird.

Holy Moley Bullwinkle! Its a flying squirrel! Rocky didn't pause to pose for pictures but scampered straight for the executive level and as I watched him climb my peripherals jumped again. Another furry flyer had followed Rocky's trajectory and began to scale the birch tree hot on his heels. Mrs. Rocky perhaps? I don't know what party they were late for but they were in no mood to dawdle. Rocky didn't even break stride when nearing the top of his climb he flung himself into space in the general direction of a line of Norway pines. His target was 50 feet away but his rocket pack was working and he casually swooped to a perfect four point landing. A half second later Mrs. Rocky carved the same smooth path through the air and continued her pursuit up the pine. Mesmerized by this aerial ballet I followed them at a walk as they passed through the neighbor's yard and eventually disappeared into the forest canopy.

What struck me was the peaceful elegance of their movement through the air as opposed to the frantic scrambling on their feet. Sound familiar? If you are a pilot, you know what I'm talking about. If you have not yet joined this exclusive club, here is what you can look forward to: All the running and jumping, juking and jiving, bobbing and weaving of everyday life belong on the ground. They do not fit in the cockpit. So what's left? Peace, beauty, freedom! It is impossible for me to leave the planet in a bad mood. Just opening the hangar door makes me smile because I know what's about to happen. Like Rocky the flying squirrel I will fling myself into space secure in the knowledge that the air will support me and my dreams will come true.

All in all, it was a pretty good Thursday, Friday nothing much happened.

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