

That warm August day in 1945 will always be special to me.

I don't know what first sparked my interest in flying. It may have been the reading I'd done. It may have been riding with Dad in that old Waco that came barnstorming to Charlie Coy's farm. Or it may have come from the ride in the cockpit of a Ford Tri-Motor just before the war.

Hearing a vaguely familiar sound in the sky, I looked up among the summer clouds and saw a lightplane to the southwest. As I watched, it performed climbs, glides, turns, clearing turns, stalls even spins. It seemed so familiar. Just like it had been explained in my favorite book "Your Wings". I could almost feel the sensations of each maneuver.

The Airdrome Tavern was a neighborhood bar that occupied a lean-to on the side of the main hanger. It was probably a stroke of good luck that Dad was impressed with Tom's bartending skills and sense of humor. Tom had been a frequent visitor to our farm, so when I asked Mom if I could go to the airport she acquiesced, knowing I would be near friends.

That old hand-me-down bicycle never covered four miles faster. The two war surplus Taylorcraft L-2M's sitting on the airport ramp looked almost out of place. There hadn't been two airplanes on that ramp at the same time for years. A newly painted sign on the side of the airport office said "Learn to Fly". After a flurry of questions Johnny Fisher agreed to let a 12 year old take flying lessons. Charges would be three dollars for each fifteen minute lesson and he recommended a lesson at least once a week. I had no idea where the money would come from but I wanted to learn to fly.

We weren't poor but we weren't rich either. Mom and Dad saved everything they could to pay off the farm. We had foster children staying with us during the war and we sold the garden produce that wasn't eaten or canned. I don't remember having an allowance or regular spending money but Mom would usually dip into the cookie jar when one of us kids needed something. As usual Mom reluctantly gave in to my pleading for enough money for my first lesson but insisted that I talk to Dad before getting involved in any long term waste of time and money. After all I had given up on music lessons and that too had been a waste of some hard earned family funds.

I went back to the airport wondering how I could convince Dad that flying lessons wouldn't be a waste of time and money. When Dad arrived from work for his regular stop at the Airdrome, we sat at the end of the bar near the big tin model of a Ford Tri-Motor that hung from the ceiling. Dad listened patiently as I explained the details of how I was going to learn to fly. Then it was his turn, I had not done well in school, I had neglected my chores and was reminded I had made plenty of unkept promises before. Would this time be any different? He finally gave in and said I could go take one lesson but we would talk more later.