

FLYING CARPET / By Greg Brown

## GIRLS' MORNING OUT

'FOUR-WHISKEY-ALPHA—IS THAT YOU?'



Hey Greg, are you free tomorrow for 'guys' morning out?" It was my former neighbor, Gary Wyant, from when Jean and I lived near Phoenix. Once or twice a year, Gary cruises his motorcycle an hour northeast through the Mazatzal Mountains from Fountain Hills, and I soar 35 minutes southeast over

the Mogollon Plateau from Flagstaff to rendezvous at Payson Airport's Crosswinds Restaurant.

Often I invite friends along; this time it was my retired Flagstaff neighbors, Suzanne Golub and Sue Weber. Suzanne is a student pilot, and Sue has long requested a ride. So early the next morning, we three winged our way toward Payson.

"Is there anything you'd like to practice on this trip?" I asked Suzanne after takeoff.

"Frankly, the radio is my nemesis. Every time I push the mic button I get stage fright. In fact, one day I was suffering and suffering on the radio while circling the traffic pattern. I babbled something on the radio, and the tower came back and said, 'Four Whiskey Alpha—is that you?'" We laughed at her rendition of the controller's quizzical inflection, and agreed that she'd handle communications this trip.

"What got you interested in piloting, Suzanne?" asked Sue.

"I've had a great desire to fly for as long as I can remember. There's not an airplane or helicopter that flies overhead that I don't stop to watch, and wish I was going along, wherever they are going."

I'd learned of Suzanne's passion for flight earlier, when I needed to relocate our Phoenix-area "airport car" from Falcon Field to Scottsdale Airport. Jean was busy, so I'd asked Suzanne and her husband, Bob, to fly with me to the Valley of the Sun to reposition the car.

"Sure, we'll help," offered Bob when he answered the phone. "I know Suzanne will want to go—she's always been intrigued by flying." Bob urged Suzanne into the front seat when we boarded that summer morning, and when I'd offered her the controls after takeoff, she'd exclaimed, "You bet!" Then, when we reached Falcon Field, Bob said, "Suzanne, I know you'd enjoy flying to Scottsdale with Greg, so I'll drive the car over myself."

"That was incredible!" beamed Suzanne after we completed our mission back at Flagstaff. "Call me anytime you're going flying, day or night, and I'll come with you!" Sure enough, the following week she eagerly joined me in retrieving Jean from a Scottsdale meeting. I hardly got to touch the controls.

"How do I continue this?" she asked after we landed.

"Do you mean take flying lessons?" I asked. Not everyone has the will to tackle learning to fly at age 65, but Suzanne was eager to begin. By today's flight, she was well along in her training with veteran Flagstaff instructor Fred Gibbs.

"Suzanne, is there anywhere special you want to fly after earning your license?" asked Sue as we skimmed pine-carpeted Apache Maid Mountain.

"Yes," she replied. "I know it's a long trip, but my first goal is to visit my best friend in Grand Junction, Colorado." With that she transmitted our landing intentions at Payson Airport.



Gary had already cinched a runway-view table when we entered the Crosswinds Restaurant, and I delighted in introducing my neighbors, old and new. Within minutes they were swapping tales like old friends. Gary is a pilot too, though he hasn't flown in years. Over corned beef hash and powerful black coffee, he told of puddle-jumping his dad's Piper Cruiser on floats around Ontario's lakes as a teenager. Suzanne detailed her pilot-training adventures, and Sue related her husbands' fighter-jockey experiences.

I'd also scheduled a brief maintenance stop before heading home. Again Suzanne assumed radio duties for the 30-minute hop to Prescott's Love Field. There, my guests chatted in the cockpit while Cobham Avionics technicians conducted a routine test and sent us on our way.

"When do you expect to solo?" I asked Suzanne as we navigated our final leg homeward.

"It's hard for me to tell, since I've never done this before," she replied, "but I'm learning a lot, and having loads of fun. So when it happens, it happens." I knew our excursion was a hit when Jean reported friendly squabbling at Sue and Suzanne's mah jong gathering that afternoon over who'd get the next airplane ride. But that's not the end of the story. Last week Suzanne casually mentioned that she might solo the next day.

"Don't forget your camera," I counseled.

"Why?" she replied. "I'll always remember soloing in my head. Besides, what would I photograph?"

"Yourself in the cockpit, Suzanne, or in front of the plane. Plenty of people will want to see it—including me!" I phoned to congratulate her the next day after receiving the accompanying photo.

"I must admit," she said, "soloing didn't seem like that big of a deal at the time, but the more I think about it... Well, let's just say I'm glad you told me to bring my camera!" Looks like we'll have plenty more to talk about at our next guys'—and girls'—morning out.

**GREG BROWN'S** books include *Flying Carpet*, *The Savvy Flight Instructor*, and *You Can Fly!* Visit his [Web site](#).