

What Soaring Means to Me James Curry

I was nine years when we move to Wisconsin. One of our new neighbors restored and flew antique aircraft for a living. He would fly these planes right over our house while waving and yelling greetings from the open cockpit. I decided then that I wanted to do the same. I wanted to fly.

When I turned fourteen I joined the local aviation venture crew that my dad started at the Brodhead airport. A tow pilot from Sylvania Soaring came and told our group of an opportunity for kids to work on the ground crew at the Beloit Airport. Volunteers would work for a full day and in return receive a flight lesson. I looked into it right away, but Beloit was a long bike ride from Brodhead. When I turned sixteen and found that the opportunity was still there, I jumped on it right away. I started working for Sylvania Soaring the weekend after I got my driver's license and worked Saturday and Sunday for the rest of the summer. I had my first lesson in late May of 2008. I discovered that I enjoyed soaring in a glider more than I ever expected. It changed my life.

Working with the gliders on the ground allowed me to really learn about the different types of aircraft. I learned how to assemble and disassemble various gliders. I learned about how each glider works and the pros and cons of the different styles. My work gave me a great appreciation for the engineers and designers of these airplanes, and a sheer wonder of aerodynamics. On the days when there was not as much flying going on, I became very good at washing tow planes and other training gliders. I learned how to make tow ropes and other general maintenance items. I worked with people who knew a lot about aviation and shared with me their knowledge and enthusiasm for flying. Working at the airport was not something that I had to do, but rather something I wanted to do. It was work I truly enjoyed.

Soaring is something that I have pursued on my own and earned on my own. No one has had to push me. Growing up on a farm and working with the dairy goats and horses taught me to be disciplined and dedicated. Training horses taught me to keep the final goal in mind and pursue it until the job was accomplished. Flying, however, took me a step further. I knew that the discipline this would require was more critical, because the responsibility that goes with piloting an aircraft by oneself does not allow for mistakes. By the end of the summer I had earned roughly twelve hours of instruction time. I soloed twice for twenty minutes and sixteen minutes, respectively, before the weather deteriorated and didn't allow for soaring. Solo flight was one of the most rewarding and exhilarating experiences of my life. I was more than eager to help with the disassembly and storage of the gliders for the winter to help pay for my ground school in the spring.

Because of the time I spent working at the Beloit airport, I was recommended for a job in the fall helping a pilot build the wings for a 1931 Curtis Wright Junior. I was approached by an airline pilot who flew for Air Wisconsin but was on an extended vacation and temporary leave due to the economy. He was going to build two sets of wings in two months, and asked me to help on his project. He said if I have him one hundred twenty

hours of work on his project, he in return would give me ten hours of instruction time in his Piper Cube. I jumped at this opportunity also, and I learned more about building wings and the structure of a wing than I had ever known before. I also had the privilege of being taught by someone who was not only an airline pilot but an outstanding glider pilot! He encourages me to continue my pursuit of soaring, especially before pursuing powered flight. He believes that my soaring training was invaluable to my future as a pilot.

These experiences have given me the opportunity to meet experienced glider pilots and work with people who are experts in soaring and aviation. I have been befriended by these people and now more than ever desire to pursue a career in aviation. I hope to become a private glider pilot and earn my sport pilot license this summer. Perhaps this shared love of flight has caused all of the people I have mentioned to help me pursue aviation as well. I have been raised to believe that God directs a man's steps, and I couldn't be more grateful for the opportunities I have been given. Soaring is now a passion for me. Flying is my future.