“What Soaring Means to Me…”

 By Trevor Lee

I am not going to lie. Two years ago I did not even know what a glider was. It was suggested to me that I check into soaring because I could get my private pilot license at a younger age than power planes. I thought it would be a great way to start my dream of becoming a pilot. My parents thought it would look excellent on college applications and resumes. The main thing I will tell you is that I was so wrong about what soaring would mean to me.

When I was younger and dreamed about flying, I never knew about soaring. Last Summer I used my own money and took a special flight in a WWII B-17 Bomber. The co-pilot, Kent Holiday, told me a great place to start at my age was soaring. So, after some long searches on the web, my mom drove me to Sky Soaring on a Sunday afternoon. I took my first flight that day with Murray Shain, my flight instructor. After we landed, I wanted to go right back up. Instantly I fell in love with it. It did not take me long to realize that soaring would be more than just a step toward other goals.

Soaring has taught me hard work and independence. I am sometimes quiet and a little shy. One of the biggest personal achievements soaring has helped me with is to use my own voice and be confident with my own instincts. Another skill I have improved on by flying gliders is decision making. From the time you start your pre-flight check to the time you land, you are constantly making important decisions. Deciding if the weather is good, if the glider is air worthy, how to avoid other air traffic, where to find a thermal, if it’s time to get into the traffic pattern, when to turn base leg, or when to turn final. There are so many critical decisions you must make, especially when you are landing. You do not have an engine, so you have to get it right the first time because you can’t go around. Decision making will be a major skill I will use not only in my aviation career, but also other life scenarios like driving.

The more and more I learned about gliding, the harder and harder I wanted to work to solo. After fifteen flights with my instructor, I soloed. My first solo flight was on September 18, 2010. It was just a traffic pattern due to the low overcast clouds, but that was okay. It was the most thrilling day of my life! When I landed, I took a picture with my instructor, and during the picture other members of Sky Soaring threw a bucket of water on me. A soaring tradition that I had not been informed of! Even though it was a long, wet, and cold ride home, I loved it. Your first solo flight is such an awesome feeling. I can barely describe what it meant to me. I felt nervous, excited, proud, and scared all at the same time. It was the greatest accomplishment of my life. I felt so independent. To this day I have six solo flights. My longest solo flight has been 38 minutes, and I experienced great thermaling. I climbed up to 4,000 feet. Talk about a view! For the rest of my life, I will never forget the first day I soloed. It is a memory that will always stick with me.

I will never get tired of soaring. I’m always anxious to get back up there gliding, and while we drive away I’m wondering when I will be back again. I want to work on getting my Private Pilot License, Commercial License, and even my Certified Flight Instructor rating.

I have learned so many useful life skills while soaring. My perspective on “What Soaring Means to Me” has become so much more than I expected. So what does soaring mean to me? To me it means a lifelong passion, a great sport, freedom, accomplishment, good friends, and fun!! I have fallen in love with soaring. It means so many things to me.

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