

What Soaring Means To Me

I started learning to fly gliders in June of 2012 at Windy City Soaring with Pete Washburn. Throughout the process, soaring has become a part of me and has helped me grow as a person. I learn new things every time I fly. It shapes my life and makes me a well-rounded person. To me, soaring is much more than just an enjoyable activity, it is part of who I am.

My interest in flying started a long time ago. Ever since I can remember I have been a passenger in my dad's Bonanza. Year after year my family ventures up to Oshkosh, Wisconsin for EAA Airventure to see different models of planes, watch the airshow, camp, and share the experience with other pilots. The week always gives me a chance to dive deeper into aviation. When my dad and my brother joined Windy City Soaring I really started to get serious about wanting to learn to fly. I started lessons and the next summer I reached the milestone of my first solo flight.

I soloed on September 8th, 2013 in one of our club's ASK-21s. I did my preflight inspection, filled out my flight plan, and took care of any other preparations. I was slightly nervous but incredibly excited all the same. I took off and as soon as I was in the air all the nerves were gone and it felt just like any other flight. There was heavy, low cloud cover so I had to release early when it started getting foggy. There was no lift so I had a short flight, which was disappointing. However, it was still a big accomplishment. It was such a great feeling being all alone in the glider knowing that I had reached the milestone I had been striving to achieve. When I returned to the clubhouse after landing I was greeted by being doused with a great deal of water. I was overwhelmed with everyone congratulating me and it made the achievement even more special.

Being on my school's girls' golf team and playing violin in the orchestra, I have met many new people, but being part of the soaring club has given me the opportunity to get to know people outside of school. Pilots have always seemed like such a pleasant group of people. I can always count on showing up at the glider field on weekends to welcoming and familiar faces. The other members of the club are extremely supportive of me and encourage me to do my best. My flight instructor, Pete, has always been a great role model. He is excellent at explaining things and gives me confidence in my skills.

Soaring has taught me responsibility and how to plan ahead. Being a student pilot has made me a more responsible person by having complete control of something as valuable and potentially dangerous as a glider. When I take the controls I am putting my life, the glider's life, and the safety of people on the ground into my own hands. Flying has taught me how to plan ahead and consider consequences. When piloting the glider you have to consider the consequences of each decision you make. I have to make sure I will have enough altitude to return to the airport, taking into account conditions such as wind and sink, and calculating the speed to fly. So many things about soaring can be applied to life away from the airport. Soaring is a way to teach yourself responsibility and good decision making.

Soaring is such a unique hobby among people my age and that motivates me to set goals and work hard at it. I plan to get my Private Glider License by the time I graduate from high school, get my Commercial License, and eventually my Instructor rating. I would love to be a part of a club when I grow up, perhaps even stay with Windy City Soaring, depending on where I end up living in the future. I know soaring is going to be something that I continue to enjoy and appreciate throughout my life. When I think about what soaring means to me, it seems the list could go on forever. Soaring is a little like a puzzle. A number of small pieces that may not be obviously important alone are put together and they become something great. That's the way soaring is to me. I add up all the things such as lessons I have learned and friendships I have made, and flying is one of the most important things in my life. Sweeping through the sky with the swoosh of the air passing the canopy is the thrill of a lifetime that has impacted me forever.