

# Goals and Dreams and Flying Machines

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Since I was seven years old, my dream has been to fly. Now, 37 years later, my dream is becoming a reality.

Flying is not at all like hopping in a car and going out for a spin. Before every flight you must conduct an inspection of your aircraft. Pilots call this the **pre-flight**. There is a specific procedure for each type of aircraft. Among other things you visually check your fuel tanks; make sure your elevators, rudder, and ailerons move freely; check that cotter pins, nuts, and bolts are in place on your control surface hinges; and make sure all locking pins are removed from your flight controls.

My first lesson was mostly class room orientation on the four fundamentals of flight: straight-and-level, climbs, turns, and descents. We did get 24 minutes of air time in a Cessna 152 single engine, high-wing, two seat aircraft.

My hands on, actually feet on, started with the taxiing procedure. On the ground you use the rudder pedals to steer. As I have now heard many times, "Right to go right, left to go left." My wife and kids have threatened to put **L** and **R** on the toes of my flying sneakers. Anyway, that first time we zigged and zagged down the taxiway. To my credit, I only put a wheel in the grass once, though we came close on several other occasions.

When we got to the runway threshold, I thought my work was over. However, my instructor pointed to the airspeed indicator and said we would lift off at 60 knots, i. e. 70 mph. As we hurtled down the runway, he said "60 knots, you can rotate any time now." Nobody said anything about rotating! My highly visceral reaction was to look at the trees looming at the end of the runway, then at my instructor, then blurt "Say What!?!"

Discretion being the better part of valor, my instructor safely got us to 1,500 feet. I just settled down when my instructor asked me if I remembered the ground briefing on the four fundamentals of flight. I said I did and he said "Good, you have the aircraft!" My fantasy of being Tom Cruise in Top Gun II dissolved. After a while I relaxed, managed to keep the airplane's nose level on the horizon and thought straight-and-level flight wasn't that bad. Several minutes later in my flying career, my instructor decided that I would be a much better pilot if I were introduced to level turns. I must say that the only thing level about a level turn is that you're neither climbing nor descending. It has absolutely nothing to do with the cabin's roll angle. While I thought my 20 degree turn was exciting, exhilarating, and breathtaking, my instructor thought it was overly gentle and slow. He executed two 45 degree steep turns to demonstrate that you couldn't hurt the airplane. He was right, of course. It didn't hurt the airplane, though it nearly brought up my pre-flight coffee.

Anyway, I retained my coffee and we landed shortly thereafter. Once again I was told "Right to go right, left to go left." This time my taxiing zigs and zags were much less pronounced and I managed to keep both, count 'em **both**, wheels out of the grass.

This first flight was two days after the Senator Heinz tragedy and my family were more than a little concerned for my safety and well-being. My wife said to call as soon as I got on the ground. With visions of them anxiously huddled around the phone, I immediately called -- and got the answering machine. They were out shopping! Momentarily stymied, I recovered, said, "The Eagle has landed!" and hung up.

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