

Training Notes

Receiving the 2009 Doug Yost Scholarship

*Story by, and photos courtesy of,
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Call me a masochist, but I actually enjoy applying for scholarships and grants. I'm a college professor, so it's almost a way of life. It's also a time-consuming process. But, the moment I send off the application, there is a rush of anticipation and hopefulness—I'm overcome with the fantasy of winning. . .



In Lawrence, Massachusetts (Executive Flyers) using the scholarship funds. Strapped in my chute and ready to go!



The Super Decathlon receives a waxing between my lessons in the Lawrence, MA hangar (Executive Flyers Aviation).

Visions of abundant hours in sparkling new airplanes, accelerated skill development, and expert instruction dance in my head. The seemingly endless days of waiting allow me to cultivate and relish my dreams. And then, once the decision is made, the brutal reality of just where I stand hits home.

As an artist, I have been on both sides of the grant and scholarship process. I've been both an applicant and a reviewer. It takes time to assemble a grant application, but I also know how grueling the judging process can be, and how a winner can emerge by no more than a vote or two. That's why I didn't get my hopes up (well, not too much) when I saw the e-mail from Mike Niccum, the president of IAC Chapter 78.

The e-mail subject was "Doug Yost Scholarship." Great expectations and hope went into my application for the Doug Yost Memorial Aerobatic Scholarship, but I was prepared for the worst. This time, to my surprise, I read the words every applicant hopes for: "Congrats!" followed by instructions to find an aerobatic school to

which the scholarship money could be sent. I was elated!

After embarrassing my 11-year-old son with my exuberance (NOT so cool, Mom) and dancing around the kitchen with my younger children, I sat down to think about what it all meant. I fly out of Hornell, New York (4G6), a wonderful airport that I fondly call my second home. Regrettably, however, it is located in an aerobically deprived region. After a bit of research, I decided the best choice for me was Executive Flyers Aviation in Bedford/Lawrence, Massachusetts. My new airport was 283 nautical miles away, according to AirNav.com.

The Doug Yost scholarship is named for Doug Yost, an aspiring young career pilot who was a captain for a large corporation and a

sport aviation pilot. Doug held an FAA letter recognizing his airline transport pilot (ATP) qualification at age 18, even though his ATP certificate could not be granted until he turned 23. He was a rising star in the world of aerobatic competition who tragically lost his life in a motorcycle accident.

The scholarship is awarded annually from an endowment established in memory of Doug Yost by his family in 2002. The scholarship fund also has continuing sponsorship from Link Snacks Inc., maker of Jack Link's Beef Jerky. An irony characterizes many scholarships; one cherished life lost becomes the inspiration to establish the funding, and eventually give life to others' dreams. The purpose of this merit scholarship is to promote air safety through aerobatic training. It is administered by Chapter 78 of the IAC.

Unlike Doug, I am a latecomer to aviation. In my article "Akro Artist" (*Sport Aerobatics*, December 2009) I paint the story of an artist by profession who falls in love with flying at the tender age of...well never mind. My introduction to aviation began with a spur-of-the-moment biplane ride over Martha's Vineyard Island two summers ago...and ended up with me flying in my first aerobatic competition two summers later. What transpired in between was a lot of hard work, a fair financial investment (i.e., cash), and a lot of dreaming.

Every pilot has certain milestones they will always recall vividly. For me, my first flight in a Waco UPF-7 is one, and the second is my introductory flight in a Cessna 152 in Hornell, New York. The wind, though not terribly strong, bumped us around a bit. With my instructor Pat's expert coaching I learned how to maneuver the airplane, and even landed it. To call that day a milestone is an understatement. It was not only the day I started flying, it was also the day I met my husband-to-be...my certificated flight instructor (CFI)!

From there, my training probably looks similar to many student pilots'. After much practice, I finally soloed, a thrilling and empowering event for every student of flight. Next was my solo cross-country, and then...unusual attitude training? Wait...isn't that a little bit out of order?

Every pilot has certain milestones they will always recall vividly.



The day I first soloed (Sterling Airways, Hornell, New York, January 2009) with Pat, my CFI and husband.



The Cessna 152 (owned by Sterling Airways) over Hornell Airport. My son Santi is flying with my husband, Pat.

What I didn't say about the Waco ride was that the pilot did some unrequested and impromptu aerobatics. And, I *loved* it! The few loops and barrel rolls performed over the ocean gave me a taste for aerobatics that didn't disappear over time; it only intensified. So much so that just after I did my first cross-country solo, I looked around for a flight school where I could do upset training and aerobatics. This is when I found Executive Flyers Aviation in Bedford, Massachusetts.

I called the school and spoke to Marc Nathanson (who would later be my instructor), and asked if he would do unusual attitude training with me. The EFA website strongly encourages pilots to get their private pilot certificate before enrolling in the course, but after a little discussion, Marc recognized my enthusiasm. We scheduled three days and four unusual attitude lessons in a Super Decathlon.

The short version of the story is that I was immediately hooked. I

more. It was December, and I was flying as much as possible. I like to say that I flew the pants off that little 152, but actually, it was the steering rod boot that came off! This allowed the frigid winter air to circulate freely around the rudder pedals, and consequently we froze through stalls and engine-outs, cross-country trips, and short and soft landings. The checkride was only days away. Toastie Toes foot warmers became my new best friends. Weather got in the way of taking my checkride not once, not twice, but *six* times! Finally, I took it and passed in January 2009.

When I applied for the Doug Yost scholarship, I had only a handful of hours in the Super Decathlon. But, my desire to continue with aerobatics was larger than the state of Texas. After I got my certificate, I returned to Bedford a few times to do some loops and rolls, but I had run dry financially. I wrote—with great expectations and hopefulness—my essay for the Doug Yost scholarship:



One of my first unusual attitudes lessons, doing a loop with Marc Nathanson in the back (my instructor).



The happy day I got my license, Sterling Airways, Hornell, New York, with Pete Treichler, my FAA designated examiner.

I returned home exhilarated and vowed that I would find a way to continue to fuel this aspiration.

made sure that Marc gave me an intro to aerobatics, and despite my getting sick after doing a bunch of spins I was hungry for more. I returned home exhilarated and vowed that I would find a way to continue to fuel this aspiration.

In the meantime, I studied hard and aced my written test. I accomplished my long cross-country, and like every student pilot, studied some

As a person who does better with deadlines and goals in mind, I gave myself the goal of participating in a contest at the end of my scholarship-funded training. I liked the idea of perfecting my few figures and sizing myself up against other aerobatic pilots. Looking at the chapter contest schedule, I knew that the Kathy Jaffe Challenge would be my only shot at achieving this goal, since the semester started right afterward.

I registered for the contest through IAC, and six days prior to the competition, I drove eight hours to Bedford, Massachusetts. My destination was Executive Flyers Aviation, of which the president is none other than the jedi of aerobatics and air races, Michael Goulian. I've met Mike several times, and his superstar status in the aerobatic world has not affected his warm and encouraging demeanor. I reminded myself of his accomplishments as I hopped in the Super Decathlon for my aero warm-up. *Everybody starts somewhere.*

It was late afternoon. An hour into the lesson, the *g's* got to me. My stomach was very unhappy, and I was certain this was not going to work out. Upon landing, I turned an unattractive shade of green and got out of the airplane completely exhausted.

Aerobatics is the stick and rudder type of flying I love, and yet the aerobatic pilot needs a rock-solid understanding of aerodynamics. Practice and study are the only ways to turn knowledge into second-nature, and for the aerobatic maneuver to transform into art in the sky.

I hope one day to fly aerobatic routines in competition, to compete nationally. I also hope to share the compelling and exciting sport of aerobatics with the world through my artwork and my teaching.

Shaking my head, I said to myself, *practice what you preach*. I promised Marc that I'd be at the open practice session early the next morning.

The chapter practice was the turning point. The IAC 35 guys were wonderful and very encouraging, each recounting his first competition stories and trials. And, I could tell that they were also amused at having an artist/aviatrix in their midst. The chapter president told me that I was the only woman he could recall ever flying aerobatics with Executive Flyers. Wow! I thought of my kids and hoped that they would be proud of their mother, especially my 7-year-old daughter.

I flew my sequence—all six figures in a row—for the first time ever, twice through. A judge on the radio named Guenther shouted in a thick German accent through my headset, "Pull! Pull! Now *pull harder!*" It was there I discovered that I needed two hands on the stick for the loop, and a calf-clenching amount of rudder on my roll out on the half-Cuban. And, through all this, I forgot about getting sick.

For the next three days I thought about nothing but aero. My instructor and I went over the aerial map of the aerobatic box at Kathy Jaffe, and we picked apart my sequence, per-

honest, I needed it. The day off gave me time to let the information and training sink in, and a chance to catch my breath and remember why I was there. Despite my goal to compete, the real reason I got involved in aerobatics was—and still is—to have fun, challenge myself, and become a safer pilot. Flying a beautiful machine upside down, and being taught by a top aerobatic instructor is the icing on the cake, and also an experience most pilots aren't lucky enough to have.

This was definitely one of those milestones, recorded in my memory just as clearly as it was logged in my logbook. The artist in me was soaking up the experience like a sponge. And I felt, in the context of my own biography, that I was making history that aerobatic week.

The day of the competition arrived. As I drove down to Lumberton, New Jersey, to meet the decathlon, I had time to reflect on my good fortune. Two years earlier I had never been in a



Aerobatic lesson (Executive Flyers Super Decathlon).

small airplane. Now, I was on my way to participate in an aerobatic contest.

I was ready to compete, especially given my abbreviated training time. I wanted the chance to test myself up there in the box, and above all, to enjoy it. Silently, I thanked the people who made this experience pos-

sible: my husband and CFI, my aerobatic instructor Marc, and of course, Doug Yost and the scholarship bearing his name. Doug was described as having a never-ending vigor for life, and I definitely share this attitude. *Self*, I said, *this is your chance. It's time to get upside down again!* 🙌



Chapter 35 practice. One of the pleasures of making new aerobatic friends was getting to sit in the Bucker Jungmeister owned by F. Paul Russo, Chapter 35 member.

It was there I discovered that I needed two hands on the stick for the loop . . .

forming sets of two and three figures at a time. We rehearsed spin exit-alignment and keeping the nose from sagging through the slow roll. After two days we had spent so much time on the 45-degree half-Cuban downline that I developed what I called a negative-g headache. (Of course this is a totally unsubstantiated medical condition, but I can be pretty creative when I want to!) I was definitely having a blast. But I was also working hard, and beginning to exhibit symptoms of burnout.

Mother Nature gave me a weather break on the third day, and to be

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