



STEVE KROG
COMMENTARY / THE CLASSIC INSTRUCTOR



When a child sits in an airplane for the first time, the facial expressions are priceless!

Pay It Forward

We can all do our part to develop the next generation

BY STEVE KROG

A HANGAR NEIGHBOR ONCE asked me why I bothered inviting kids to come to the airport, sit in the airplanes, and often go for a first flight.

“They’re just a bother and get in the way,” he said.

I asked him how many airplanes he owns. He said he owns three.

“What do you plan to do with them when you can no longer fly?”

“Sell ‘em,” he said.

“To whom?” I asked. “If we don’t attract and groom a new crop of aviators, there won’t be a market for any of our airplanes.”

He thought about that for a while and then agreed. That discussion happened several years ago. Since that day my friend has been very cordial to any young visitors and has offered rides.

FIRST FLIGHT RECOLLECTION

What is your first recollection of airplanes and flight? Did you see an airplane fly overhead and wonder what it was? Or did a family member take you to a nearby airport for a close look at aircraft? Do you remember the excitement you felt when you saw your first airplane up close? How about your first airplane ride?

At day’s end, I do believe the participating pilots get as much satisfaction and enjoyment from flying these kids as the kids experience from their flight.

My first airplane ride was more than 50 years ago in a green and white Cessna 175. I can picture it in my mind as if it had occurred just days ago. My excitement had been building all week in anticipation of that first-ever flight. The first thing I recall was the distinct aroma of aviation fuel when walking across the ramp and nearing the airplane. It is very distinct and unlike anything I had experienced.

After a preflight by the family friend pilot, he started the engine and taxied to the south end of Runway 18/36. The pilot did a few things — ran the engine, set some gauges — and off we went. I watched as we lifted off and the earth dropped away in amazement!

If your recollections are like mine, you were likely as bitten by the aviation bug as I was after that first flight.

The exhilaration and freedom I felt as the earth dropped away and as we climbed out of the pattern was something I had never before experienced. Seeing life below me in miniature was something I never could have imagined. We flew over the farm where I lived and the small town where I attended school. It looked so small and compact. I’ll never forget those images and the feelings I experienced that day. I knew that I was destined to fly airplanes!

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO PROMOTE AVIATION TO THE NEXT GENERATION OF PILOTS?

What were your first recollections of flight? Awe? Fear? Amazement? Now, what have you done since then to share those sensations with others? Without sharing the experience of flight with someone, particularly a younger person, who will you turn your aircraft over to for safekeeping when that time comes?

In the grand scheme of life, we as pilots make up less than 0.2 percent of the U.S. population. There was no true nor organized effort to attract young men and women into the wonderful world of aviation until EAA launched the Young Eagles program. This program has allowed EAA pilots to share the pleasures of flying and seeing the world from new heights for the first time.



Above: Soon-to-be Young Eagle Peyton completing the EAA form before going on her first flight.



Right: Peyton and her mother, Erin, a CFI, completing a Young Eagles flight (and first lesson). Peyton has been bitten by the aviation bug and now wants to learn to fly.

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STEVE KROG

Some airports and airport users have little interest in promoting the airport and attracting young, potential pilots. I feel sorry for the managers of those airports because they will miss the shared feelings and comments of individuals experiencing flight for the first time.

Some airports have daylong events promoting aviation, the airport, and the services the airport can provide. These are good events, and I encourage all to participate and become a general aviation goodwill ambassador. There are so few of us, and we all have a role in promoting aviation as we know it.

Other airports are sometimes the best-kept secrets in a community. The airport where I am based (HXF) has been here for more than 70 years, yet I often meet people who are not aware that we even have an airport. It is hard to believe given the amount of traffic and activity we experience on every good VFR day, but it is true.

What we have done in past years — and will be doing again this summer — is hosting an all-day event at the airport. With the assistance of the local chamber of commerce, we will have several hot air balloons on hand for demonstrations, some flights, and a dusk balloon glow. In addition, the local pilots based here will be providing Young Eagles flights throughout the day. These two activities together have drawn several thousand people to our airport in the past, and we expect a similar turnout this year.

In previous years, we have flown as many as 220 kids, each earning a Young Eagles flight certificate. Yes, it takes work, coordination, and a lot of volunteer time, but the effort is well worth the result.

At day's end, I do believe the participating pilots get as much satisfaction and enjoyment from flying these kids as the kids experience from their flight.

However, the gleam in their eyes, squeals of delight, broad smiles, and the desire to go again expressed by these kids make the event most worthwhile!

I'm not suggesting that every GA airport in the country go out and stage an event. Rather, we, as active pilots, should try to provide two or three Young Eagles flights each year. If even 10 percent of the Young Eagles go on and pursue learning to fly and/

or a career in some aspect of aviation, that calculates out to potentially 15,000 new aviation enthusiasts! Now, if we each did this for the next three to five years, think of how healthy the future of GA could become, all because we donated some time and talent toward rebuilding a regressing industry!

Have you given a Young Eagles flight? If not, you should try it. The reward of seeing and hearing a young person describe the flight to friends and family is immeasurable. It will bring back fond memories of your first flight. Life is good. *EAA*

Steve Krog, EAA 173799, has been flying for more than four decades and giving tailwheel instruction for nearly as long. In 2006 he launched Cub Air Flight, a flight training school using tailwheel aircraft for all primary training.



A Saturday morning Girls Fly event at HXF generated a great deal of interest.



Pilot Dan flew separate flights with three sisters — Autumn, Ally, and Amy — making them new Young Eagles.



Young Eagles Scarlett and Peyton listen to Steve Krog explain a steep turn in a J-3 Cub.



Twin brothers Emmett and Avery express enjoyment as they prepare for a flight with their dad, Brad.

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