

Learning to Fly - A mature beginner's journey

Author: Diana Jemson

info@flyingonline.biz



Diary log 1

Our hearts were pounding. We were peddling as fast as we could. I looked behind me... my brother was trailing... not far behind me, but he was trailing, just. We had a mission. We had a destination. We had to get there... quickly!

There it was, looming in front of us... the gateway to the airport. We were almost there. As my brother caught me we wrestled for who would get through the entrance first. Ah, ahead he went. It didn't really matter who got there first but the race was all part of the ongoing sibling rivalry.

Every weekend as young kids, we made this hike to the Moorabbin Airport (Vic). We loved it. We rode around the streets reading all the Learn to Fly signs, and only every dreaming that one day it might become a reality.

And so the seeds were sown and my journey in the dream had begun. Today it's a very different story and here I am writing about something that has lived in the back of my mind for a very long time. Pushed so far back, that at times, I wasn't even aware of the dream being there at all.

In 2006, quite a few years after the dream began and the seeds were sown, I had the means and opportunity to learn to fly. I took myself to Jandakot Airport (WA) after researching flying schools on the web and decided on one I thought would suit me. So I went for my first ever flying lesson. Oh

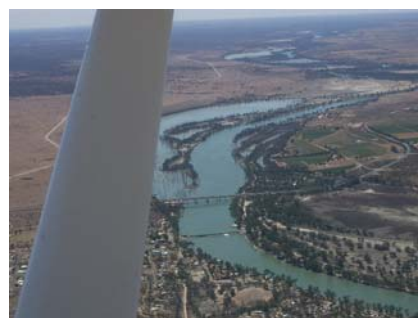
the theory... oh the flight... oh the pain... and oh the joy! The joy of soaring through the air, looking down on the world and the sights, or seeing horizons far away! It was a dream come true.

Learning in the summer months is not the best time to learn and learning in the PA38 Tomahawk... you really had to love flying and like your instructor even more. Being in such close proximity on such hot, wild, windy and bumpy days... sometimes took the thrill out of the day. I persisted though, til I got to circuits, then circumstances prevailed and I had to move back home to SA.

Once home in SA, I went looking for a flying school I could resonate with, but sadly, gave the dream away once again.

Two years later and now it's October 2008. Out of the blue, an old friend emails me and suggests we catch up. He also says, "...and check out this link... and see what I am doing now". So with that, I clicked the link. My jaw dropped to the ground in amazement. I promptly emailed him back and said, 'you're not the only one'. He had sent me a link to a picture of himself standing in front of an Ultralight, a Jabiru LSA in fact. Well... I had to know more. We promptly organised a chat over coffee.

The discussions over coffee lead to him suggesting that next time



he was going flying, I might like to accompany him to come up and have a look. Well... the rest is history as they say!

Of course the Jabiru is a little smaller than the Tomahawk... but I am a great fan of the smaller the aeroplane, the better. So I was keen to be a passenger, no matter what. After several trips as a passenger, I was ready to put my feet in the water again, or rather my feet on the pedals with stick in hand.

The journey is a slow one... and I have found that very frustrating, because of course I want it all yesterday and as much as my instructors tell me "it's not a race", well... I really don't believe them! For me, I am just making up for lost time.

So yesterday and today I have been on two dual lessons.... It's December 2008 and I have almost a week off before Christmas and so now is the perfect time to get those hours up. Other than the practical and theoretical lessons of flying, another big lesson is Trust! After two sessions of bursting into tears (the previous week)... due to frustration and the fear of hurting someone else (totally irrational I know) my instructor for this week says to me, "I have to get you to trust me". WOW... didn't I trust him? Here I was sitting at his mercy in a tiny little plane, not very far above the earth and I didn't trust him? Was he mad? Well, that

Learning to Fly - A mature beginner's journey

Author: Diana Jemson

info@flyingonline.biz

really made me sit back and think about the process even more. I am after all, a great thinker!

Hmmmm, I need to get out of my head and start to feel it again, with the seat of my pants. As he said, he's not about to let the plane crash. Makes sense really!

And the second lesson.... Relax! My goodness, I don't think I've held that stick quite as tightly as if I were hanging by a fine thread from an 80 storey building. "Let go. Relax. Stick in the middle. Use your feet. Pull back. *Pull back. PULL BACK!*"

Finally... we touch the ground... after flying precariously like a madwoman from side to side above and across the runway (must have looked very sloppy to anyone watching)... but a touchdown, and a relatively good one at that. "Great effort", my instructor says, gives me the thumbs up and puts a smile on his face. He is pleased with my progress, but I am disappointed. I was supposed to fly above and along the runway, not land on it! Never satisfied... what a hard task master I am on myself.

I consider myself a slow learner. My instructor says, for my age, most people are at the same level. I make that mean I am average (or he is just being nice)! Damn... I so wanted to be a quick learner! But age is against me, as well as potential physical fitness and eyesight problems. Can't wait for Nav's.

So I have a day off tomorrow. Rest and some study for Thursday's lessons, Engine failure after take off and Glide Approach.

My aim for the end of this week is to be flying the circuits and landing with confidence (and grace) whilst getting ALL my

radio calls correct, whilst turning downwind, base and final and then VACATING not evacuating all runways!!!

GA hours 7.6 in WA (2006)
PA38
Ultralight dual hours 10.8 in SA
(2008 - current) Jabiru LSA 55/3j

Diary Log 2: Going solo

Well I have a lot more hours under my belt since I last wrote, plus... the excitement of having finally gone solo. But one cannot explain both the joy and the fear of going solo. When the instructor gets out of the plane, turns you around and says 'go'.

WOW... I am on my own now, there is no turning back, once I take off... I HAVE to land myself. *How exciting!!!* I line up at hold point Bravo, make my taxi call then enter and back track the runway. Turning at the end... "Murray Bridge traffic, Jabiru 1849, rolling two zero for circuits, Murray Bridge traffic". With that, the power is on, the stick is back gently to take the pressure of the nose wheel and as we approach 55kts, she lifts off. This is the moment of truth... I am on my own now... what a wonderful feeling... but can I do it? Well I think to myself, I really don't have much choice. I HAVE to land it now, there is no-one here to help me, I *will* run out of fuel eventually (although not for quite a few hours), so ultimately I HAVE to land it myself. No turning back now so to speak.

So around I go to begin my first solo circuit. I know the routine, I know all the calls, I know all the heights.... Just fly and enjoy! First turn into crosswind and still climbing, level off at 1200ft, then turning downwind and put in my downwind radio call. Downwind

checks begin: brakes off, undercarriage down (we have fixed undercarriage but I go through the routine anyway) fuel tap on (no mixture settings to worry about), enough fuel to go around (oh yes!), hatches and harnesses secure, and yes, there is moisture in the air... so I will be using carby heat. Late downwind... Ok I am ready for the base leg. Carby heat on. Power back, descent begins, as I am turning I make my base leg call, flaps in and set to one stage. Approaching the final leg.... Ok, make sure I am at the right height (700ft), lookout to make sure no-one is on a long final. Look out complete, I make my first solo turn on final. Call in to notify anyone mad enough to be even close to where I am at the moment, and final checks to be completed.

Now it's time for the big C - Look down the runway and ensure it is clear (clear), check the windsock (slight wind - remember stick into wind, opposite foot), carby heat off (pushed in). Ok... now it is time to focus. Coming down lower and lower, and lining up on final... I am very nervous... I get closer and closer, 200ft over the fence... it's all looking good... getting closer to the ground, oops... things going a little wild... watch that wind.... Ok I am not confident this time so I call a go-around, power on and off I go.

As I tend to err on the side of caution... the second one is another go around, but much closer, much more in control, just not 100% confident.... So around I go for my third try.

Third and fourth circuits are fabulous and the touch and goes very very acceptable. Fifth circuit is my full stop... and again... handled very well and most

Learning to Fly - A mature beginner's journey

Author: Diana Jemson

info@flyingonline.biz

acceptable. Flaps up, fuel pump off... I taxi to Bravo, make my 'all runways vacated' call and taxi back to the hangar. Oh my God... I feel so elated... I DID IT, I DID IT... all on my own.

In front of the hangars I do my 3, 2, 1; Radio off, mags off, master switch off. Sit there for a moment and take it all in. Grab the maintenance release, complete the details and finally get out of the plane with maintenance release and pillows in hand.

I am shaking. My legs feel like jelly. I can't believe that FINALLY I have done it... I went solo and did 3 very acceptable landings. I feel great. I walk inside and am congratulated by a friend who came up with me... the friend who introduced me to the club and ultralights. It's a good cause to celebrate and as I won't be flying anymore today.... it's time to celebrate with something stronger than water!

Ultralight dual hours 25 in Jabiru LSA 55

Diary Log 3: The learning continues

So I thought solo was the biggest hurdle of all... it seems that is not so. It was however, my first big milestone of achievement in flying! It also gave me the confidence to press on with my learning.

Of course there is always more to learn and lots to experience. And so after my solo flight... comes more pain. Whoever said flying was fun... was a nutcase! or very young, or very adept at picking up 3 dimensional skills, or had experience on flying remote controlled planes etc. Anyway you want to look at it... it wasn't easy for me and I often felt very

challenged and stupid. Hang on a sec... wasn't that one of the reasons I took up flying... to have a new challenge in my life? Well I certainly got what I wished for.

After my first solo, the weather wasn't favourable for more solo hours for a few weeks... however as it turned out that was ok as there is always more to learn. I learnt about engine failures, after take-off, from within the circuit and from height. It helped to refine my flying skills even further. All that gliding practice and keeping to the best glide speed of 70kts (fine -tuning to perfection, not perfect for me, but becoming a better and more confident pilot). And of course much circuit practice in amongst all of that training.

Finally one early morning... the weather was favourable. "Ok" said my instructor, "let's go up and see how you are today." And with that, off we went to do a few circuits and practice 2 stage of flap landings (not always essential on the Jabiru, but great in calm weather for a very nose down approach). My instructor happy with my performance sends me on my solo way.

I am on my own again, for the second time... this is absolutely exhilarating. So off I go, I do a circuit on my own, then depart late downwind for the northern training area. Climb to 2500ft and practice some turns. It's time to go back. I make the 5nm call, "Murray Bridge Traffic, Jabiru 1849, 5 miles to the north at 2500. Inbound, estimate circuit time 49. Murray Bridge Traffic".

I am on my way back to rejoin the circuit. As I join midfield crosswind, I check the time and notice I am right on the mark... I begin to feel very proud of myself. So I join the circuit, do a

touch and go, and depart to the east. Turn around, make the inbound call, join the circuit, touch and go, then depart to the south. Finally I come back in and land successfully (of course). It has been another wonderful day... I feel fabulous, I have control, I can land the plane calmly without any incident or bumps, I know where the wheels are... and I touch them down very gently. I feel great.

The following week after another lesson, I get to take off on my own again, this time heading out to the northern training area to practice Stalls, Engine Failure From Height (EFFH), and more depart and rejoins. I cannot believe how different I feel now to when I first went solo. It seems like I have taken a huge leap forward in both confidence and skills, knowing that the first time wasn't just a fluke, or the second time, and that I really CAN do this myself. I am flying and I am in control. Does everyone feel like this after going solo?

The following week I learn about Precautionary Search and Landing (PSL) and we do some side slipping. I get to land at some other local airstrips (Rollo and Paechs). I am still having a bit of difficulty guessing my heights. Doing my circuits around the airstrip, I am not sure of the height of the second airfield, I think I am a bit low... but not really sure... I am still working off my heights from the Murray Bridge airfield. I mention this to my instructor and he is very encouraging. We talk it through and after my preliminary circuits to survey the strip along with the under and over-shoots and any obstacles, I land. Checking the altimeter I see the height of this airstrip is 400ft. Ah... so even though I wasn't sure how high I was, something told me I was a

Learning to Fly - A mature beginner's journey

Author: Diana Jemson

info@flyingonline.biz

bit lower to the ground than usual... 200ft lower in fact. So that has given me another level of confidence and perspective, that I sensed I was lower than usual (even though I wasn't entirely sure).

After a break I go out solo again. This time when I practice, I conduct PSL on both the local airfields again. Now I know the correct AGL height of both, I fly them at the correct circuit heights. That feels good, and it helps me to get my eye in for unknown territories in the future, although my instructor ensures me I will learn a lot more about that when I do my Navs. Another excellent day of flying under my belt and I am starting to feel like a real pilot.

Now, it's 12 March 2009. It's 7am and I am doing my regular early morning drive to Murray Bridge and the Pallamana airfield. It's a great morning, calm, peaceful, no cloud... just the way we like it.

My instructor asks me how I am feeling and did I get a good night's sleep. "Yes I did" I reply "and I've already checked out the wind sock and see there is no wind". Yes he agrees, it is a great morning. So I go out and check the plane over for our first flight of the morning then come back inside and sit down to have a chat with my instructor about what we will do today.

He is sitting at the table with paperwork in front of him... just my file I assume. Well yes it is, but I see there is a pre-flight test paper there as well. Oh my... is this the day of the test? I did set myself a goal of obtaining my licence for my birthday and this happens to be my last lesson before my birthday. The good news is all my written exams are

passed and out of the way so now all I have to do is focus on and pass the flight test. That's a pretty good place to be in. He explains that the pre flight test is for both of us (but mainly him of course) to assess where I am at and what else I need to work on before I do the actual flight test. Ok I say to myself... I can do that... and I tell him I just want to practice another EFFH with him as well.

So out to the training area we go, practicing stalls, EFFH, PSL, turns, side slip, landings etc. Great I feel really good about all of that. We taxi back to the hangar and get out for a break.

After coffee and another chat... it's time! Time to do the flight test. Now... I am very nervous, even though I breezed through the pre-flight test, now I am going to be tested, and the panic sets in and all my self-doubt returns. Can I do this? Will I get it right? Hope I don't do so something really stupid!

Off we go, but instead of departing to the north, we depart to the east and I am directed to an area I do not know at all. Talk about taking me out of my comfort zone. We are flying toward Callington and my instructor says "I want you to do a PSL at the Callington airfield". Oh my... this is very different. I do a fly over to check the windsock. Yes, the wind is blowing a slight crosswind so I will use Runway 18. I commence my precautionary circuits and determine there is a fence to be aware of on the undershoot, no powerlines to consider, there are trees either side of the runway, so no room for error. The overshoot is ok, the climb out is perfect, no obstacles or powerlines to be aware of... a clear run. Finally I determine the runway to be safe, long enough, no other obstacles

or livestock, no ruts, ditches or soft ground. However, the most daunting thing about this airfield, is that it is in a valley and one side of the runway, my circuit side, has an incline and hills to worry about. This is disorienting but I keep my eyes open (very wide) and am constantly aware of my surroundings, the hills and their height, my height above the ground and the fact that my instructor looks very, very relaxed. This is a good sign.

Finally I do my calls to Callington traffic and perform a short field landing on 2 stages of flap. Yay, I landed safely! Ok off we go for a short field take off and we are on our way again. So I continue the test and finally track inbound, join the circuit and land. The test is over.

Brakes on, flaps up, fuel pump off. I am about to turn around so I can taxi to Bravo and vacate the runway. My instructor looks at me as I kick the right pedal in to turn around and says "Well Diana, that's it." I said, "What do you mean?" and he replies with a huge grin on his face, "You have passed".

Words cannot express the way I am feeling right now. I am over the moon with excitement and jumping for joy on the inside. I'm sure the expression and smile on my face conveys the whole story. Finally... my dream is realised. This was something I didn't think I could or would ever achieve, but I have. I am flying, I am in control and now, I am a recreational pilot, all this just days before my birthday. What a wonderful birthday present. To say I am over the moon is a gross understatement. I savour the moment of victory and elation. What a way to end the session for this week.

Learning to Fly - A mature beginner's journey

Author: Diana Jemson

info@flyingonline.biz



Ultralight Solo hours - 5.6

Ultralight dual hours - 43.7

Very many thanks to **James Hubbard, CFI, Recreational Pilots Academy, Pallamana Airfield (Murray Bridge)** for his patience, persistence and understanding. He assures me the naves will be much easier and definitely less tears. Await the next instalment!

Article as published in the June 2009 edition of Recreational Aviation Australia magazine, pages 38, 40, 41, 46 & 47