

Aloft With Aidee

Greetings, I have a short story for you. Most of you from Building 12 know or remember Larry Parish and his wife Aidee. I have known Larry and Aidee for almost 20 years.

Somewhere back then, years ago, Larry went flying with me in an old white and yellow rented Cessna 172 airplane based at the Corona airport. I still remember that flight. I was a newly minted pilot. Larry was one of my very first passengers. I had never rented that particular plane before. On that flight, when it got around sunset, I couldn't find a certain switch to turn on some lights, and I was not at all comfortable flying around in the dark with some lights off, so we landed at Corona and I drove him back to his car which was parked at the Chino airport. I still had more to learn.

To say things have changed is an understatement. I have owned my own airplane for over 16 years. All of the knobs and switches are automatic to me, similar to when you are in your car. I still have a solid Plan B in my mind whenever I take off, however. But not about knobs and switches.

About a month ago, Aidee surprised me with an email asking me to choose her as my fly-buddy for the Corona Pilots Association's fly-in to Lake Havasu today. I always like to take someone up for their first flight with me. I wrote her some crazy emails, but I couldn't scare her off. You know me.

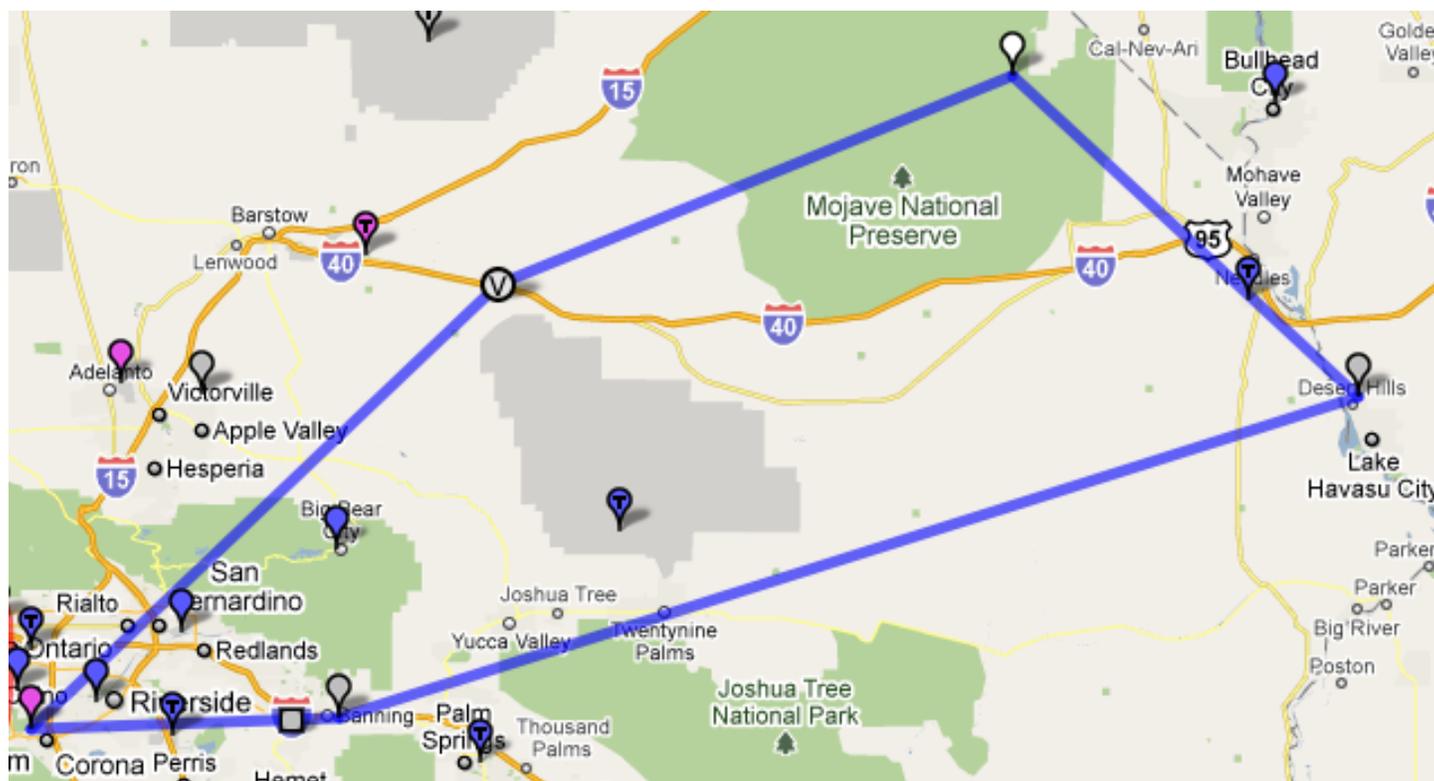
Aidee showed up on time and immediately gave me a big hug. Yes, she knows what I like. Then she gave me a surprise gift, a pin depicting Mickey Mouse dressed up as a pilot with flying goggles on his forehead and holding a leather pilot's helmet. Then she called for fuel for me. She also jumped right in and assisted me getting the plane checked out and ready to go. I pulled it out and the fuel truck guy came by added 10 gallons of 100LL aviation fuel. And she wanted to pay for it. I declined her offer, at least for then. I wanted her to have a fun day, and it sure started off that way.



We climbed in. She couldn't see much out of the front window, but when I presented her with a pillow to assist height challenged gals, she was fine. Then she learned about wearing a headset so she could hear what was going on while the engine/propeller noise was muffled. The engine run-up was perfect, she was smiling big time and good to go, no one was coming in for a landing, so I pushed the throttle knob all the way forward (i.e. I stepped down on the gas pedal) and that Lycoming IO-360-A3B6D engine once again roared to life to propel us down Corona's runway 25 westbound. It is only a 4 cylinder engine, but they are big ones and it is rated at 200 horsepower.

Per her request, Aidee was holding on to the yoke in front of her to feel what I was doing and at 70 knots indicated I pulled my yoke back slightly and we left the ground. Reaching 80, I raised the landing gear, and at 90, I brought the flaps up and re-trimmed for a proper climb rate. Aidee was still holding on to her yoke over there, so about a mile out, I put my hands in my lap and asked her to make a left turn and she did. Another left turn had us heading east, directly to the Banning Pass.

We climbed at 120 and I pointed out the decommissioned March AFB down there as we slid by. A Piper airplane was flying parallel to us a mile over as called out by ATC, but we soon left it in trail. Aidee saw it first and pointed it out to me. The ride was surprisingly smooth and we went over the Banning airport at 9,500 MSL doing 150. I was talking to ATC and they were watching us. Aidee was still smiling big time. She was having fun. The autopilot was flying the airplane now.



Corona is depicted at the left with the purple push pin, Banning is depicted here about an inch to the right with the gray push pin. There I turned 16° left to 72° true or 59° magnetic to point us right at our destination. The large gray area near the middle is a military restricted area and it is off limits to us. I planned to land at the Lake Havasu (KHII) airport located at the position of the gray push pin over to the right on this map section.

SoCal ATC turned us loose 15 minutes after we passed the Palm Springs area with the phrase “5807T, Radar Service terminated, squawk VFR.” LA Center was not accepting VFR handoffs and so we were on our own as far as watching for other nearby airplanes. Situations like that make me feel good that I purchased an Avidyne traffic awareness system a year ago. There weren’t any nearby airplanes anyway. We were over God’s country. No roads, no buildings, nothing. Just desert, us, and occasional craggy hills below us, in different shades of brown. Exception: The gullies all had turned to stripes of green from fresh growth due to the spring rains.

About 40 miles out, I started a very gentle descent, so as not to interfere with a slight case of head congestion that she received due to a untimely head cold. All I really did was push one white plastic button on my autopilot and then press on a white plastic rocker switch for 5 seconds. The plane headed slowly down. I dialed in 119.025 MHz on Com2 to listen to current weather conditions there, and then to 122.7 to listen in on what runway the pilots were using. OK, Rwy 32 was in use.



We passed by some good sized hills just north of us and the airplane started bouncing and rocking around a bit due to the winds being disturbed by that terrain to our left. Aidee got a surprise bout of apprehension from the jiggles so I reached over and put my right hand gently on her left leg and said “It’s alright babe, I’m right here with you.” Smiles returned to her face. Soon the jiggles stopped but my hand was still there. (I was smiling too). Innocent fun. Route pictures from runwayfinder.com.

We made left traffic for 32 and landed and turned off when we slowed down. I was then looking for a **Red Golf Cart**. There it was, and I followed it to an open parking place. The driver in a **red t-shirt** jumped out and gave me hand signals right to the last inch, to my parking spot. Then he chained my airplane down for us and gave us a lift to his workplace called Desert Skies Executive Air Terminal, a private business on the airport. His saving me a 3 minute walk is very important to me. Thanks guys.



A really neat place



We went inside and it was beautiful. I placed a fuel order with Amy. Their fuel was only \$3.89, about 50 cents a gallon less than Corona's price, and for 50.9 gallons we're talking about a \$25 savings. Amy was professional, knowledgeable, courteous, and so pleasant to deal with.

We then went next door to join everyone else from Corona at ...



Consistent with my style, we were about the last ones from the CPA to walk in the door. But not by much. Gotta quit flirting with Amy next door. There must have been 40 people there from Corona.



A glimpse of Waldo's World Famous BBQ from their website

The big table(s) holding 25 CPA members were filled so we were ushered to a table for 4 nearby. Did you notice that there is a real airplane suspended from the ceiling? Well, our table was directly underneath that fancy **Blue Can** with wings. I wasn't scared, I get along well with **Blue Cans**.



I got a shot of it looking directly up from our table, and a snap of Aidee doing the same.

Then she wanted to take a picture of me from across the table. It is really not what you think you are looking at. I was in the middle of raising my hand to push my glasses up into their proper position but she got me midway and she likes this picture so I will include it. I look like a pixie tho ...



Note, those are two huge flat screen TV's behind me, not pictures. I still look like a pixie

Lunch arrived, I had Ribletts that melted off of the bones and Aidee had a pulled pork sandwich. We were both very pleased with our lunch. I ate nice and slow and enjoyed every bit. Then she surprised me and covered the lunch bill. Tasted even better.

During the course of our lunch, quite a few friends stopped by our table and I had the opportunity to introduce Aidee to them. This was one fantastic idea by whoever came up with the CPA going to Lake Havasu for lunch. Everyone was smiling and happy. I vote we go back next year too.



A couple more pictures of the Waldo's BBQ restaurant as we departed. What a neat place.



Desert Skies had this late '30s fuel truck on display out front, a neat plus for us tourists

After lunch we walked next door and found some shade in the breeze as it was almost 90° and we were certainly not used to that in April. We went back next door to Desert Skies to pay for my airplane being refueled while we were having lunch. Aidee was adamant that she wanted to chip in with fuel too, so I explained the numbers and then she covered her fair share instead of the whole \$198 worth that it took. Thanks babe, really appreciated! I should fly with you more often.

As soon as we walked back outside, a shiny **Red Cart** came by, driven by the same guy who took care of us when we landed. Smiles all around, he took us the 500 yards or so back to my airplane. He is a pilot with his own 1950 Beechcraft Bonanza and he loves it.

We walked around and looked at all of the nearby parked airplanes. All so way different. I explained that the red and white one nearby was covered in stretched fabric then painted. Aidee said no way! I tapped the end of my fingernail gently on a portion of the tail and she listened. Very similar to the sound of tapping on the skin of a drum. She was convinced about that airplane but immediately asked “Your’s isn’t cloth, is it?” I said ‘No, mine is covered with aluminum.’ She seemed to somehow like that better. Both methods are good at what they do and that cloth is stronger than most think.

We departed at 2:30 in the 90-ish heat and with full tanks and full tummies. It took a while for the Mooney to decide to depart the runway under those conditions but with a 8001’ runway, I was not concerned. That is nearly three times as long as Corona’s runway. Slowly, we climbed northwest then we veered 20° to the left to intercept the Colorado River north for a while to get past some hills. Guess we were too high to notice if any ‘skinny dipping’ activities were going on below.



We could barely see the boats, just their white wakes show here

Then I let the autopilot take over to guide us to my GPS user waypoint that I named DOME. That is an alias to find 35.2147° N and 115.2035° W per Google Maps.

By prior arrangement, we were going to fly next over to John and Sue Wheeler's summer vacation dome shaped house constructed in the Mojave desert a few years ago along with Larry and Aidee's help. It is in a rather desolate area known as the Landfair Valley. About 15 miles north of I-40 and 10 miles east of US 95. Also in the area of the CA – AZ - NV 3 way border point.

Think about this a moment. A 20 foot diameter building in the middle of a huge desert, and I was supposed to take us there? Thanks to Google Maps and GPS technology, I can, and I did. It was about a 20 minute ride and I leveled off around 6'500' MSL. The Wheeler's place is at around 4,200' MSL so we were going to be about a half a mile above it.

That part of the trip was somewhat bumpy, which can be a big deal to some of the gals who fly with me. So while George flew the Mooney, I went back to more important duties, namely placing my hand back on Aidee's left leg and flirting with her to get her mind off of the bumps of course. I saw a smile. She had some doubts on finding the Wheeler's dome house as everything was different looking from our vantage point. Then she spotted a road that looked familiar. Then a mine off to the north. Then she recognized some terrain just ahead. She was now sure we were in the right area.

Aidee started snapping pictures with her big digital SLR camera with many advanced features and interchangeable lenses. It is set to take huge pictures, in the 4.5 to 5 MB range.



Getting close, it is really desolate out there but a few people must like it living that way



Once she saw the Gold Dome Mining Operation she was sure we were on the right track



Found it - we circled overhead and as I dipped the right wing, Aidee squeezed off some pictures



As her pictures are huge, I was able to crop in tight for a closer view

From there we climbed to 8,500' and headed west to the Hector VOR, another aviation navigation waypoint, as the bumps disappeared and it was a super smooth ride again. Aidee was taking pictures of landmarks that meant something to her like Cruthers Canyon and the Kelso Dunes.

Once past the Hector VOR, we veered left towards Corona. Along the way we saw open pit mines on the desert floor and also on the north face of San Gorgonio Mountain, home of Big Bear, Lake Arrowhead, Crestline, Lake Gregory, Silverwood Lake, and still lots of snow.



Silverwood Lake area

We headed roughly over I-15 and the Cajon Pass then southwest past the Ontario airport. ATC veered us left for spacing from Chino's Class D airspace, then turned us loose when we were 5 miles out. I descended to 1500 MSL, dialed in 122.7, announced my position and intentions, and made some turns to put us in the traffic pattern for Rwy 25 at Corona.



The *ONLY* time I like #&@*\$ highway 91 is when I am looking **down** on it!

About 425 miles later we arrived right back from where we started. And we do this for lunch!

It must have been around 4 o'clock when we landed so I had plenty of time to pull two Blue Cans from the trusty hangar fridge, set a spell with Aidee, and flirt some more. Larry, she is snuggly too. ☺ We talked about the day, what we saw, what we had experienced, what we learned, and who we met.



Then she went inside and added her sentiments about the day and the flight on my white board. And just how did she feel about her first flight with me? Well, just check out that big Ipana smile and you tell me. Next she backed out of the hangar and we put the Mooney to sleep for the night. Before turning to her car, she gave me a big thank you hug and you know what? I think I felt a very gentle kiss on my cheek, but I won't testify to that. Her last words, as she turned to her car, were "This is not the last time." It so much fun doing what we do.

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