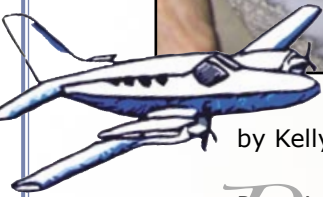


WOMEN OF THE SKY: SOARING ABOVE

Meet Suzanne McGowan



by Kelly Kitchel

Pursuing a life hobby of aviation adventure seems like a nearly impossible dream, but Suzanne McGowan and Neida Naumburg are up to the task. These two amazing women, who live in different states and lead separate lives, share an attitude that allows them to master anything that sparks their interest, and a desire and dedication to empower younger women to find that enlightened attitude within themselves.

Suzanne grew up in Clayton, California, a small city near Mt. Diablo in the San Francisco Bay area. Her father worked in the oil industry, so she spent much of her childhood overseas, mainly in Indonesia. It was Suzanne's frequent international travel that first sparked her in-

terest in flying: "Back in the old days before security concerns, kids were allowed to sit in the cockpit with the pilot and watch him fly the plane. I remember going into the cockpit for the first time and looking at the controls and looking out over the sky. That was when I knew I wanted flying to be a part of my life."

When Suzanne earned her pilot's license in 1975, flying a single-engine plane, few women were interested in becoming pilots. She got her license with just 44 total hours of flying, and only 9 hours of solo flying, which are very low numbers by today's standards. Suzanne recalled her first solo flight very well: "The first day I soloed was the best day I can remember. I was in the plane with my instructor when he said, 'pull over.' He hopped out of the plane and told me to fly alone. I did three touch-and-go's and my knees were shaking so badly, I could barely keep my feet on the rudders! It's a pilot's best day when you finally get to fly solo. I have to say, though, that I am still thrilled every single time I fly."

Nine years later in 1984 Suzanne met her husband, Mel. "He encouraged my love of flying but refused to go up with me in my single-engine plane. Finally he said that if I learned how to fly a twin engine, he would buy one for me. So I learned, and he bought one!" Suzanne and Mel have recently purchased their seventh plane, a turboprop King Air. "A turboprop is a whole new category of flying," she said. "It required a very intense week of training and I love flying it. A turboprop twin engine is very similar to a turbojet, which means it's quite fast and powerful."

The larger size of the King Air has allowed Suzanne to carry her friends to a favorite destination. Each year she flies to the internationally attended EAA AirVenture Oshkosh convention in Wisconsin. Pilots of all kinds from all over the world fly in to the convention to marvel at



advancements in aviation, discover its history, meet new people, and much more. "It's a very exciting event for me," said Suzanne, who confessed that her favorite part of the convention may be the landing itself. "Sometimes there will be 100 planes circling in the air waiting to land, so it can be a little bit scary," she said. "The tower will call planes down one by one, and sometimes you will be landing with three other planes on the runway just before you—it's quite a thrill!"

Suzanne likes to hone her flying skills by participating in an annual proficiency race. She is 1 of only 3 women out of 50 contestants, and she has come in second place more than once. "I love flying in the race, and it is important for women pilots to get out there and participate," said Suzanne. "I am a member of the International Organization for Women Pilots, and right now there is a shortage of young women learning to fly. I'm trying to change that."

Flying her own planes is not only a passion for Suzanne, but also a source of convenience for her and Mel. They own a beautiful home on the coast that is a 3-hour drive by car from their home in Bakersfield, California, so they hop in a plane and make the short 20-minute flight by air. They also have a home in Yosemite, and flying a plane shortens the travel dis-

tance from a 4-hour drive to a 45-minute flight. Convenience will increase when they move to their Yosemite home with the addition of the aircraft hanger they are constructing.

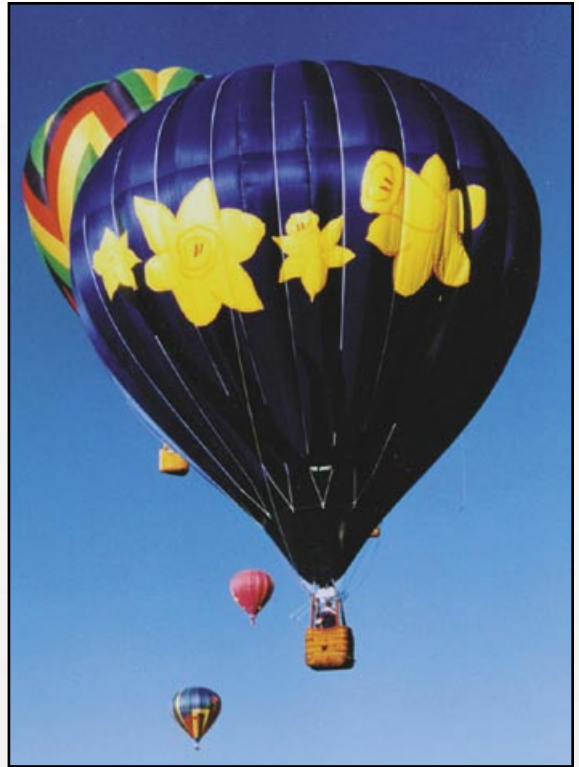
Suzanne's flying is also a nice complement to life with a coach. Suzanne and Mel purchased their first coach in 1989 and upgraded to a new Marathon earlier this year. In the past few years, they have enjoyed driving their coach to a beautiful location, then flying back and forth from the coach to Bakersfield in Suzanne's planes. Next winter they plan to leave their coach somewhere in Florida to give them a luxurious taste of summer on weekends. Mel and Suzanne also enjoy attending Marathon Coach Club rallies and spending time with club member friends. They particularly liked last year's "Pikes Peak or Bust!" rally (held in Colorado Springs), and the 2002 Washington, D.C. rally.

Wherever Suzanne's adventures take her she is sure to bring her excitement for new challenges and expand her passion for flying. "Flying was my dream, a dream I pursued and achieved. I love to take young girls up in my plane so they realize it is a wonderful goal, and one that is possible to accomplish. It opens amazing doors and seemingly endless possibilities, and today it still thrills me every time I take to the sky."





Meet Neida Naumburg



Neida Naumburg's journey to the clouds took a very different course, in a very different aircraft. Neida has piloted hot air balloons since the early 1970s, when she watched her first balloon competition. "It was the first championship in Albuquerque, and as I watched the balloons float across the sky, I had an overwhelming desire to fly one. I immediately decided to purchase my first balloon."

Neida ordered a balloon right away and took possession of it (that was in 1973). Since then, Neida and her husband, Peter, have owned up to four balloons at a time. "I didn't realize how much work it is to have and fly a balloon," said Neida. "It is really a three- to four-person sport. The balloon can be piloted in the air by one person, but it is quite a heavy load to transport on land, as the basket and envelope together can weigh as much as 1,000 pounds."

Transporting the balloon was a task made easier with Neida and Peter's Marathon coach. They bought their first coach in Dallas, Texas, and have traded up to newer Marathons since then. "We loved using our coach to pull the van carrying our balloon and gear because we could park the coach outside the hotel at the flight competition and relax in the comfort of our own private home."

Neida was born and raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico, when its population was 35,000. She and Peter are still there today, only now the city boasts a population of more than 600,000. Neida raised three children in Albuquerque; two of them still live nearby and one lives in Dallas. "I love having family near me," Neida said, "but with our kids spread out we have an excuse to travel more often. Between me and Peter, we have kids in Albuquerque, Dallas, San Jose, and Boston, and Peter's parents in New York."

Like Suzanne McGowan, Neida attends the EAA AirVenture Oshkosh convention in Wisconsin. However, Neida's experience at the convention is very different. Neida is the executive director of Balloon Explorium, a nonprofit organization dedicated to school programs that use ballooning to illustrate the concepts of physics, math, geography, and weather. At AirVenture Oshkosh, Neida directs the Balloon Explorium booth within the larger KidVenture area, where children can experience aviation firsthand.

"Balloon Explorium gives children of all ages the opportunity to construct and take home small aircraft and do high-tech flight simulations. They get to build rockets, meet their aviation heroes, and create log books. In the past,



we even offered tethered balloon rides and had a basket equipped with burners that kids could climb on and control.”

Neida’s Balloon Explorium booth has become a very popular installment at AirVenture and helps Neida in her goal of educating younger generations about balloon flight, and aviation in general. “Children don’t often have the chance to learn about ‘lighter-than-air aviation,’ or actually experience it. I want to put it right in their

hands so they feel how wonderful it is and develop an interest in it to carry with them as they get older.”

Neida’s interest in flying has never dwindled, and up until four years ago, she flew regularly in hot air balloon competitions throughout the country with the Balloon Federation of America and the North American Balloon Association. She has also flown overseas, and has fond memories about a particular race in the Netherlands: “There was a big celebratory race for the 200th anniversary of balloon flying in the Netherlands. When they realized they didn’t have any female pilots racing, a friend called me out of the blue and asked me to fly to the Netherlands and do the race. I was the sole female participant.”

In the past few years, Neida has developed a renewed interest in the more “grounded” hobby of race car driving. When she was growing up she raced with her brother in an Austin Healey Sprite, but with the commitments of school and then kids, she no longer had time to drive. Her interest was reignited in 2005, though, when she crewed for a friend racing in the Australian/U.S. Healey Challenge. “It was great fun,” Neida said. “We followed the Aussies around from

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race to race, and I even cooked a big Mexican dinner for them one night.”

Neida and Peter decided to buy their own race car shortly after the Healey Challenge. They considered vintage cars but opted for a vehicle with less required upkeep and bought a Spec Miata. “Peter is the crew chief and I am the driver. I have been racing it on a road track, which is really exciting because road tracks have twists, turns, and elevation changes that make driving a real challenge,” said Neida. “I am improving my skills with practice and I’m looking forward to more training later this year.”

In August, Neida and Peter will be students during Marathon’s *Jim Russell Racing Schools*

mini-rally in Sonoma, California. “We are very excited to learn from the pros about driving,” she said. “It’s also a great opportunity to see club member friends and enjoy their company, which is why we love to attend club rallies. Our Marathon coach has exposed us to wonderful relationships that complement our lifestyle.”

Neida brings enthusiasm and moxie to all her endeavors, and also an insatiable eagerness to impart her knowledge and passions to those around her. “I want to inspire more children to discover the excitement of aviation. Balloon Exploration is one way I do this. By putting experiences at kids’ fingertips, they realize that the larger goal is definitely within arm’s reach.” •



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