

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

» Getting to Know COPA Pilots



LAURIE EINSTEIN KOSZUTA has been a freelance writer for many years and along with her husband, John, now owns a Cirrus SR22. With John as the pilot-in-command and Laurie as the partner, they regularly travel to see family, visit friends and enjoy our beautiful country. You can read more of Laurie's work on her website: www.laurieeinsteinkoszuta.com.

Brant Thrasher's Hardest Lesson as a Pilot

by Laurie Einstein Koszuta

Laurie Thrasher knew that her husband, Brant, had always been fascinated with aviation. He had served in the U.S. Army for 17 years, enjoyed airborne training and became familiar with the Lockheed C-130 Hercules and C-141 Starlifter used by paratroopers.

Laurie also knew that Brant would have taken private flying lessons if there had been enough time while serving in the military. It was a dream that Brant had to put on hold to pursue his goal of becoming a physician, which the Army financed. Years later, Laurie surprised



« **The Thrasher's 2006 G2 SR22** purchased in 2022 and Brant and Laurie enjoying a flight (above).

him for his 50th birthday by giving him a gift certificate for a flying lesson at a flight school located at Johnson County Executive Airport (KOJC) in Olathe, Kansas.

"It was a great gift," said Brant, currently the executive director of the American Board of Urology, "but at that time, I was chair of the department of urology at the University of Kansas Medical Center, working full time as an academician, running a clinic and performing surgery. I didn't want to commit to anything

long-term but decided to wait and see how the first lesson went."

When he arrived for that lesson at the flight school, Brant was surprised to learn that his instructor was only 25 years old. "When the instructor discovered I was a physician, he thought it might be a problem because of the stereotypical doctor-pilot and 'get-there-itis' scenario. He just wanted to be clear that those things and a possible enlarged ego could be dangerous."

Brant, however, wasn't deterred. "As a physician, I know my profession well, but I also know that when learning something new, you must swallow your ego, understand that you will make mistakes and ultimately be humble. Since I spent a lot of time in the military, I had no problem taking orders, and my instructor's age didn't matter. He was very competent, and I knew he wanted to teach me to be a good pilot."

Taking that first flight was all Brant needed to make time in his schedule



On approach at Dawtaw Island, located northwest of Fripp Island in South Carolina.

for more lessons, additional coursework and training. Brant observed the adage that “once you’ve flown, you never look at the sky the same again.”

After receiving his private certificate in 2011, Brant’s instructor wanted to sit down and have a frank discussion. “He told me that if I wanted to be a good pilot, I should become instrument-rated and suggested that I continue taking lessons, which I decided to do right away.”

Six months later, using a different instructor for his instrument training, Brant prepared for his check ride. “My instructor suggested I fly from Kansas to Chicago, which was in a Cessna 182, a plane that was available to use at the time. Before we got very far on the trip, my instructor told me to turn back and

said I was not ready. I was struggling with the avionics as the plane had a glass panel, which was completely different than the six-pack of the 176 that I had trained on. After that, I practiced a lot and became more familiar with the 182. Six to eight weeks later, I passed my check ride immediately.”

Staying proficient, flying regularly and getting varied perspectives from other pilots helped Brant correct potential bad habits. “I learned some great lessons,” he said, “but the best lesson I ever learned is when I crashed a plane. That sounds terrible, and it was, but it changed me.”

The plane, a Piper Mirage, was one that Brant and three experienced pilots partnered to purchase. It had a complicated

cockpit, advanced avionics and more horsepower than he was used to. At the time, he had only 196 flight hours, but with a couple of check rides, he was able to fly it well, although he still had trouble staying ahead of the airplane.

Just a day after completing his training in the Mirage, Brant was at the controls of the airplane and his partner was in the right seat. They were getting ready to take off following a bad snowstorm. The runway was clear, but accumulated and plowed snow was piled high, approximately 2 feet on either side of the pavement, barely allowing clearance for the wings. With full power and a slight crosswind on takeoff, the plane immediately pulled hard to the left, causing Brant to overcorrect to the right and

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back left. At 80 miles an hour and ready to rotate, the left main tire hit the snowbank and jerked left into the median, scattering prop pieces and significantly damaging the plane. Fortunately, the plane did not flip, and no one was seriously hurt.

"It affected me a great deal," Brant said. "Especially after the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) called it an accident and not an incident. I had so many doubts about my abilities that I relived that accident over and over in my mind and wondered if I should give up flying. I knew I had to decide whether to let this crush me or become a better pilot. I wanted to learn from my failures and vowed to take more lessons to make me a safer, more proficient pilot. I started flying again with different people and on various aircraft. I also worked on a Redbird simulator. One of my partners told me he would keep flying with me because he thought I was a good and conscientious pilot."

Ultimately, the airplane was fixed and Brant flew in that Mirage for many more hours, most of which were work-related trips less than 500 miles. He soon realized that he didn't need an airplane of that magnitude, and as a result he and one of the partners decided to split off and sell their shares. Eventually, he was invited to buy into another partnership involving a 1965 Bonanza V-tail after those partners agreed that Brant had the talent and skills to keep flying.

Several years later, while at a medical meeting, Brant heard someone talking about the Cirrus aircraft, its capabilities, the avionics, the CAPS system and the fact that it had air conditioning. The conversation piqued his interest and made him want to learn more.

"Laurie had guarded skepticism after the accident and wasn't excited about flying," Brant noted, "but she changed her mind

when she found out the Cirrus had air conditioning and a parachute." Brant now owns a 2006 G2 SR22, which he bought in 2022 after selling the Bonanza.

"Right after I bought my Cirrus," he said, "I joined COPA because of their benefits and discounts. It has been beneficial when making decisions involving the airplane. I view COPA as an organization of people who want to help others improve and be the best pilots they can be."

Brant's final thoughts when discussing Cirrus ownership, "In the future, I want to get involved in Angel Flight or something similar to help people who might need trips, especially medical ones.

I am a better pilot because of what happened," Brant explained. "I've talked to

many people who wish they had learned to fly, but life got in the way, and they regret not doing it. I am glad that Laurie made it possible for me with that gift certificate.

We live on Fripp Island in South Carolina now and enjoy flying down the coast. We can fly to go scuba diving, vacation and visit our daughter in Kansas City more often now. Laurie probably said it best recently when we were taking off. She said she wished more people could experience and see this beauty from the air. She is right, it's amazing." +

≡ **An overhead view** of the busy waterways of Charleston, South Carolina, located north of Fripp Island where the Thrashers now reside.

