

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

» *Getting to Know COPA Pilots*



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Shari Meyer's Flight Path: From Small-Town Roots to the Skies

by Laurie Einstein Koszuta



Growing up in a small mountain town in rural Northern California, Shari Meyer thought becoming a pilot meant joining the Air Force. With no airport in town, her only exposure to aviation came from a neighbor who flew for the military.

This perception changed years later when she and her husband, Ken, an ophthalmologist, lived in Sacramento. They had an older female patient who was also a flight instructor. During each appointment, Mrs. Robertson would invite Ken and Shari to take a ride in her plane. One day Shari finally agreed to go. “I thought it sounded exciting,” recalled Shari, who was in her

late 20s then. “Ken refused at first, but he had no good reason when I asked why. I told him it was fine if he didn’t want to go, but I was going. It didn’t take much more convincing and we went together.”

Mrs. Robertson and her husband, also a pilot, lived on an airfield and wanted to show off their sleek Cessna Cardinal 177 before taking a flight for lunch.

“I was sitting in the back seat, watching this lady fly the plane,” Shari said. “It was like a lightbulb went off in my head. I realized that if that woman could fly, so could I.”



➤ **Shari** takes to the skies in her SR22.

During the flight, Mrs. Robertson handed Shari a sectional map, the predecessor to today's digital aeronautical charts. "I loved the feel, the smell and everything about it," she said. "I couldn't believe I was looking at a map I had never seen before, yet I instinctively knew how to read it and follow along. I thought it was the coolest thing in the world."

At the restaurant, they met another couple – both pilots – whom Mrs. Robertson had invited to join them. On the flight back, Mrs. Robertson pointed out that the couple's Mooney was flying nearby. It was the most impressive plane Shari had ever seen, igniting a feeling she had never experienced.

Later, she told Ken she wanted to take flying lessons, but he dismissed the idea outright. He knew she could do it, but he didn't want to learn to fly. Her response was simple: "That's not my problem."

Determined, Shari booked a one-hour flight lesson in a Cessna 152 at Rio Linda Airport (L36) with an instructor who gave lessons after his full-time job. "Ken and I are so competitive with each other that if I do something, he wants to do it too," she said. "Eventually, Ken gave in and took a lesson, too."

Until then, Shari was burned out and felt a void, even thinking about changing careers. "I considered going to law school," she said, "but when I took that first flight lesson, it was pure magic, and law school wasn't even a thought anymore."

Shortly after, Ken and Shari were at the airport's fixed base operator (FBO) when she spotted a Trade-A-Plane magazine filled with aircraft listings. After flipping through, she told Ken they needed to buy a plane. His response was instant: "Are you crazy?"

But Shari had already made up her mind. She wanted to own a Mooney like the one she had seen on that first day of flying. After scouring the listings, she found a nearly new Mooney with just 70 flight hours for sale. Despite each only having an hour of flight time and knowing nothing about airplanes, Ken supported her vision and urged her to call the seller.

"I made the call," she chuckled, "and told the seller I wanted to buy his airplane and asked how would I do that. The seller probably thought I was a nut, but he listened. I told him that if he delivered the plane, which was still under warranty, I would buy it. I was every seller's dream come true!"

On the day of delivery, Shari arrived early to speak with Bill, the airport manager and owner, hoping to secure a hangar. Unfortunately, none were available. But when she mentioned that she had just purchased a Mooney 252, Bill's face turned ashen. And when she told him that the delivery would be in a matter of hours, his reaction was one of real concern. As Shari quickly explained the situation, Bill put an arm around her, like a father and asked, "Do you trust me? Let me handle this for you."

When the seller arrived, Bill took charge. Shari didn't know Bill's entire background. He wasn't just the airport manager and owner but also a designated pilot examiner (DPE), an A&P mechanic, a retired Air Force colonel and an experienced pilot with over 30,000 hours. Bill wheeled the plane into a hangar, removed the cowlings and began a thorough inspection.

"For hours, the two men discussed every detail," Shari recalled. "I didn't understand anything they were discussing; I only knew I had not gone about this purchase correctly. Right after Bill put the cowlings back on and reassembled the plane, we took it for a test flight. The two men sat in front at the controls while I sat in the back."

Bill took the plane through a series of maneuvers and, after finally landing, smiled and congratulated Shari on the new purchase, even noting he had a hangar available for her. He advised her to continue training in the Cessna until she could solo, then transition to the Mooney as it was a high-performance/complex airplane.

Despite her busy work schedule, Shari committed to multiple weekly lessons and earned her private pilot certificate in four months. Eight months after getting their certificates, Shari and Ken purchased a Cessna 340 in addition to the Mooney. They flew both planes until they sold the Mooney eight years later when they retired and flew the Cessna 340 for 17 years until they purchased their Eclipse jet.

Ken and Shari obtained their instrument rating, commercial license, multi-engine rating and type ratings in both the Citation and Eclipse jets. Today, she and Ken each have about 3,600 flight hours.

Flying became a way for the Meyers to decompress from the stresses of patient care and running a practice. "As workaholics, the only way to truly disconnect was to get in the air and focus one hundred percent on flying," Shari said.

"We now fly to places we couldn't reach in the jet, returning to our roots and flying more than we ever did ..."





Flying together was initially a challenge for the couple. “In the beginning there was a lot of bickering,” Shari noted. “To me, Ken was doing everything wrong; to him, I was. Because we are so competitive with each other, it took a while to learn how to work as a team. Once we considered each other’s perspective that changed everything.”

COVID also changed their flying mission. “We were no longer flying coast to coast or making frequent trips to the Bahamas,” Shari said. “With our mission shifting, we weren’t flying as much and started to miss the hundred dollar hamburger runs, the low-and-slow flights and the ability to take in the landscape. The Eclipse was no longer the right fit, and we worried it was becoming a ‘hangar queen.’”

But when their only son, Bryan, passed away in 2023, their perspective changed. “After that, I decided that we needed to be closer to my daughter-in-law and granddaughter who live on the central coast of California,” she said. “But driving eight hours to her place from our home in the mountains of Northern California was exhausting, and the Eclipse jet was too costly for frequent trips.”

The couple decided a piston airplane was the best and most practical solution. They looked at several but kept returning to the Cirrus as the right choice.

“I didn’t know much about the parachute, but the more I learned, the more it sealed the deal, especially going from two jet engines down to a single piston,” Shari said. The couple

sold their Eclipse and, in 2024, bought a 2021 SR22T from a seller in Southern California.

“The Cirrus is amazing,” she said. “It performs beautifully and is way more economical. We can fly back and forth without worrying about parking it outside for a week on the ramp. And we always take our 6-year-old granddaughter, Alaia, up in the plane. We now fly to places we couldn’t reach in the jet, returning to our roots and flying more than we ever did when we had the jet.”

Shari stressed that the purchase of the Cirrus was completely different from her initial airplane purchase of the Mooney. This time, they used a broker and had a pre-buy inspection. Shari then joined COPA immediately after buying the Cirrus.

“Ken had been a longtime member,” Shari added. “But I wanted to join, too. I like to get on the forums to learn about maintenance, operations and safety. I’m always looking for ways to become a better, safer pilot and COPA gives me that. We signed up for our first CPPP, and I’m really looking forward to learning more about the Cirrus and safety.”

Looking back, Shari recalls the challenges she faced as a woman in aviation.

“When I started lessons 35 years ago, my instructor had an old-school mindset about women in the cockpit,” she said. “That made me more determined to succeed. And I did just that. Aviation has changed, and I no longer feel like a minority; I feel like an equal.” ☺