

Fresh Air Matters... with Capt. Yaw

Last week I had the wonderful privilege of leading a flock of aviators in discussions about a group cross-country flight with four aircraft in loose formation. This group of men and a solitary woman represented different continents, countries and backgrounds, flying experience and passions. None of them are, or have any intentions of becoming, commercial pilots. All of them learned to fly, or are learning to fly, in order to satisfy an internal passion, ticking, tickling and gnawing at them. Something that all agree happened to their hearts, minds and souls on a fateful day in their past – some pasts were recent, others... well, there are history books, you know! All in that room smiled and laughed in such a relaxed manner, I knew that something special was afoot.

The trigger for all of these people, ranging in age from twenty-one years to over [information withheld], was a split second; a momentous moment that can never be taken away from them, nor would they want it to be. That moment, that sea-change in attitude and change in the way that their eyes perceive the planet we affectionately call 'Earth', was the moment that they sat in the cockpit of a small, single-engine training aircraft and felt the thrill of the undercarriage rising and separating them from the surface of the planet. They were there, sitting at the controls of the machine as it did what it was built to do: become a controllable, man - machine interface, impersonating bird life (with a little more noise...).

That passion had ignited a flame inside, so strong, so bright and so persistent that they moved on and continued daily to develop in ways that use the skill of flying as integrally as their own heartbeat and breath, inseparable from their very beings, in the same way a violinist needs to play. Violinists seek the smell of rosin as they prepare their bows; they feel the end of the bow under their right 'little finger', and special touch that only the scroll at the end of the neck of a handcrafted instrument can give their left hand, as they prepare to play a moving piece of classical music. As the violinist slips the chinrest into position and draws the bow across the precious instrument, the vibrations enter the body as the sound enters the ears, and life becomes more colourful and more satisfying than ever before. In the same way, true, passion-driven pilots seek to feel the throttle lever, the joystick, the attenuated resonance of the engine purring louder and louder under the cowling and the kick-in-the-back acceleration that makes them grin each and every time they set off on another sky-bound experience that will reinforce their flame of passion.

Most people who fly find that flying improves their minds, responses, planning and approach to Life in general. The best part that most comment on when reflecting on a 'just over' flight is that, during flight, their minds became detached from their earth-bound worries and concerns, and their mental calculation and reflection became focused on the task in hand, refreshing their minds and spirits in thirty minutes with the same efficiency of a two-week holiday on a sandy beach. Sounds strange, but it is true. If you do not know a pilot to ask this of, ask musicians who play classical music – they cannot think about anything but their music when they play, or they get it wrong. How much more so when you take control of an aircraft! Getting it wrong on the violin 'scratches the ears'; getting it wrong in a plane 'scratches a lot more'.

I have observed that most people are satisfied to have the adventure of somebody else. To save you re-reading the last sentence, I will repeat it: most people are satisfied to have the adventure of somebody else. This is so evident from friends and family who are 'satisfied' to know somebody who has travelled to Europe. 'My friend became a doctor and moved to the USA' might satisfy some people's desires to achieve and travel. You will hear it all the time, if you listen carefully and substitute the relevant words and sentiments. However, it

is important that we all actually do something that satisfies our deep desires, our yearnings and our ambitions.

Failure to do that 'something' that makes you feel so fulfilled, swamped with warm and comforting mind completion, will leave each and every individual yearning for that flavour they can't quite remember. An empty feeling that makes each day confusing, like a jigsaw puzzle with just one piece missing; and that piece is so vital that the whole picture cannot be interpreted. Seeking that feeling from others' achievements and adventures will only suffice for so long, before you need to seek your own wings and your own direction.

It is interesting that so many feel that this state of incompleteness is obligatory and 'their lot'. It is not. There are many things that we can reach out to, or reach up to. Perhaps it is painting, drawing, writing or gardening. Whatever it is, you need to find it - or you will always wonder what it should have been.

What is most sad is when I find young people who have been cajoled, or even 'forced', into careers by their parents or friends. I have met many career pilots who can't wait to leave the cockpit and seek a desk job. They are like a jigsaw puzzle with some of the pieces in black and white – there is a picture, but it lacks life, as well as a few pieces. How many doctors and lawyers do we have, who entered the profession at the whim of another? Others who sought to achieve their own nirvana through the life, interest and career of another. Such arrangements do not work and lead to sadness, poor professional performance and in many cases depression.

Today, some people will be inspired at Kotoka International Airport as they 'fly international' for the first time. A small boy or girl in a village will look up at Lufthansa, descending at around 3pm this afternoon, and consider becoming an engineer, air traffic controller or even a pilot. This past weekend at the Air Show at Kpong, countless children and adults have been inspired; their ambitious heights raised by the performance of pilots and planes cavorting through the lightly Harmattan-dusted sky. For many it is enough to have seen it first-hand. For others, it has planted a seed of desire - a seed that will grow its tap root to the depths of the human soul until it is given some water to allow it to grow the leaves of realisation.

Whether it is flying, music, painting or something else – in the words of the Nike advert 'Just do it' and find the missing piece of your puzzle ... like the aviators of my meeting last week ... and soar to new heights with a satisfaction as you complete yourself and your personal puzzle. Have a great week watching the skies... and step out with confidence.

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