

Note to Donna and Sofie: You ladies were both fantastic today and we had our own Angel showing me the way to the Bermuda Dunes airport after it got dark. More about that later.

Sofie and I started our day with a big old hug and I took our picture before we got in the airplane. The teasing and jokes were already out of control. What a fun gal to fly with.



It was bumpy for 5 minutes after we departed but then it went away and smoothed out while we crossed northwest over the LA Basin. Sofie likes the bumps. Later, we had some bumps for 5 or 10 minutes over the high desert on the way up to Fresno from Corona and I was reminded how the bumps spooked Sima. So in respect to Sima, I held Sofie's knee 'till it was over. The next time it got bumpy, Sofie held my knee in respect to Sima. We smiled and giggled and flirted and joked and laughed on our way and enjoyed the varying scenery. Some areas were clear and some very hazy.





Later we were near the Fresno area and I started letting down. True story - not a fish tale: ATC told a Cessna pilot that we were 60 knots (70 MPH) faster than he was. We landed at Fresno on runway 29 Left just ahead of an airliner on 29 Right, the parallel runway. Mooneys always out race jets too.

The airport at Fresno is large, bordering on huge. We taxied and taxied to Corporate Aircraft to meet Donna, our Angel Flight West passenger. Some things are worth waiting for and we waited. Sofie and I always enjoy each other's company and so the wait was a plus. More teasing and smiles.



About 45 minutes later, pilot Bob McGregor landed in a beautiful red, white, and blue pressurized Cessna 340 twin engine airplane. He had brought not only my upcoming passenger Donna, but

also May Locke, a cancer patient who I have previously flown twice from Fresno to El Monte for Angel Flight. They all came from farther up north in California. When I met Donna, I set the day's standard and gave her a hug right away. When May came around the corner, she smiled and reached up to give me a hug. May went off to fly with her next AFW pilot and the three of us (Donna, Sofie and me) took a few pictures on the benches in front of Corporate Aircraft.



Me hugging on Donna and the both of them smiling

After engine start, I was cleared to taxi to runway 29 Left via taxiways Alpha, Bravo 5, and Bravo. Somehow, I missed a turnoff and no one from the tower got on the radio and said "Hey stupid..... I said 29 Left ". I finished my run-up and called Fresno ground with a radio transmission that went something like "Uh this is Angel Flight 5807 Tango at 29 Right, we were cleared to taxi to runway 29 Left, would you like us to taxi back to 29 Left?" You could hear the chuckle in his voice as he said " Angel Flight 5807 Tango, you are fine right there and you are cleared for departure on 29 Right". Who says pilots (we are human too) don't make mistakes? This place is huge.

We climbed out smartly in the cool temps and after 30 seconds the Fresno tower told me to contact Fresno Departure. Fresno Ground Control had already given me an altitude restriction on departure of 2000 feet, a squawk code of 0126, and a Departure Control frequency of 132.35. Fresno Departure told me to cancel the altitude restriction and climb unrestricted. I climbed to a modest 5500' above sea level and pushed a single button on my autopilot which lowered the nose and kept us right there at 5500' for the next 45 minutes. There were very few jiggles and no big bumps.

I monitored my gauges and flirted with both gals. We giggled and joked and flirted a bit more. I asked Donna if her first pilot had flirted with her. She said no. I reached back between the front seats, grabbed her leg, turned around, and saw her smile. Southwest Airlines doesn't offer that kind of personal service.



Rainstorms over the Sierras to the east



Endless farming below us



That's not ocean down there, that is thick haze

For 50 years, pilots have nicknamed autopilots 'George'. Like in "Let George do it." Sofie likes to call mine 'Joe'. So when I fly with her, I have to remember that I have to remember that too.

We cruised southeast down the very hazy San Joaquin valley. Around Bakersfield I started a climb from 5500 to 7500 to clear the upcoming terrain. Smart move, eh? Further south, Joshua Approach cleared us through the Restricted area called R-2515 at our altitude. This area of airspace surrounds Edwards AFB. We saved a few miles as I angled to the left towards L26, the Hesperia airport. It was around sunset.

My plan was to get near Hesperia, then turn right and go south through the Cajon pass used by I-15. As we were still at 7500 feet, I saw that a 15 degree turn to the left of the Cajon pass over Lake Arrowhead was safe to clear the ridgeline and we could shave a few more miles off of the ride.

This was my first night flight since Dave at DP Air fixed my instrument panel lights. They worked perfectly and I was thankful. My Plan B is I have 3 flashlights on board. Some pilots call flashlights "A container for dead batteries". Mine all work.

As dark as it was getting, and as we were flying relatively low around high terrain, I started to visit the terrain page of my Garmin 496 from time to time. Nothing like a little reassurance that Pilot Ed is doing it right. It was getting dark quick. 10 minutes later we were coming up on I-10, so very visible in the dark as thousands of headlights and taillights showed the way. We turned left and went that way.

I started to get seriously concerned. My destination airport was Bermuda Dunes (UDD), I had never been there, it was now black dark out, and I never want to go somewhere (physically or mentally), that I cannot get myself out of. I spoke up on our intercom and said "Donna, if I do not like what I see, or if I get behind what is going on, I am diverting to the Palm Springs airport." She was fine with that. Sometimes I lean forward 4" in my seat as if that gives me a closer view at 180 MPH.

BAM - CRASH - JIGGLE - JERK - YANK - DROP - BUMP - BANG. All hell broke loose. CAT or Clear Air Turbulence. The airplane was pointed in 3 directions each second. I got my hands off of my lap and positioned them close to the yoke to take control. I then turned off the autopilot and started hand flying. It was unnerving going that fast, in the dark, and trying to control an almost out of control airplane with three people inside. Donna told me later that she got scared but listening on the intercom, she said I was laughing and Sofie was laughing and that calmed her nerves. Laughter is the best medicine.

Momma turned the bump switch off. Just that quick. Mother Nature was done toying with us after just 2 minutes and it was again calm and peaceful. It was very dark except for the street lights and highway traffic lights below us. SoCal (ATC) turned us loose with "Radar service terminated, squawk VFR and switch to advisories". Sofie dialed in 1200 on the transponder and I switched to 122.8 MHz on the com radio for UDD.

I kept descending and heading for the unknown. Thank goodness for onboard GPS moving maps. 10,000 strange lights ahead, and I am supposed to find an airport? I turned my landing light on and made a call on 122.8 and a very nice (our Angel) lady answered back on our radio, said she saw us, and to continue straight ahead. She said their airport was just on the north side of the freeway. I said "The north side?", and she said her compass was momentarily upside down, look on the south side.

Bless her, I soon saw two parallel rows of dim white lights 4 miles right in front of me! The (Angel) lady commented that they were not known for the brightest runway edge lights. Plop - bang, I crashed at the airport of my intentions. We taxied right up to the admin building where we could see our angel in an orange t-shirt waving at us through her window. I went in and thanked her.

It was a refreshingly cool 70 something degrees outside. We took a few final pictures, Donna called me an angel. I felt so good.





Bye Donna



Beware flirting pilots!



My trusty steed waiting 30 feet away

We exchanged hugs once again and then Sofie and I took our leave. No offence, but with Donna, her 2 luggage bags, and more fuel used up compared to Fresno, my Mooney leapt off of that runway with vigor. It was easy to follow the lights on I-10 back between the mountains and westward to Corona.

Sofie wondered aloud and exclaimed how beautiful and how awesome night flight is. It is. It was her first for that experience. It is awesome over populated areas. I think of it as a tapestry of lights every time I see it from up there. One of my blessings.

Way too soon my avionics advised me that it was time to descend and so with ATC's blessing, we did, right back to Corona. I crashed at the airport of my intention once again.

We had some more conversation, shared a push back up the rise to get the Mooney into the hangar, more smiles, a silly comment or two, a quick hug, and we again parted our ways. I love that gal.