



Change your life

New challenges, new destinations *By Craig Fuller, AOPA President*

I am grateful for the opportunity to offer a few insights in my first *AOPA Flight Training* “perspective.”

January 1, 2009, marks the beginning of a new chapter in my life, as I become only the fourth person to assume the presidency of AOPA, an organization of and for pilots founded in 1939. This is something about which I am very excited. And, it comes as I enter my forty-first year of flight.

Truthfully, I am as excited to begin this new adventure inside AOPA as I was 41 years ago when I became a private pilot.

I was reminded of that moment in 1968 a few weeks ago during a meeting with one of AOPA’s very generous donors. As our meeting was about to begin, our host shared the news that his son had just become a private pilot. Although the father was proud, he expressed concern that his son lacked a degree of expected excitement. Somewhat concerned, the father held up his own pilot certificate and exclaimed, “See this card? It will change your life!”

What I hope, as you read each and every issue, is that you focus on what a wonderful difference being a pilot could make in your life.

Indeed, the card I have carried for 40 years has changed my life in ways I could not have imagined. Flying has taken me to wonderful places and to places that have become routine. What has *never* been routine is the thrill of traveling to either type of destination in the left seat of a general aviation aircraft.

I have enjoyed the opportunity of doing a good many interesting things in life. Along the way, I was introduced to the concept best expressed as, “You get what you focus on.”

When I really focused on flying, my family lived in Northern California and I was in high school. My initial training took place at a Cessna training center at Buchanan Field in Concord. I also focused on photography, and suddenly I discovered the wonders of aerial photography. As so many others have discovered, general aviation in California can take you into the mountains or out to the Pacific Ocean, and I certainly explored both opportunities.

Flying continued during my college years at the

University of California at Los Angeles, where the airports in Van Nuys and Santa Monica became my bases of operation. As a consultant in public affairs, I found Grumman Tigers and Cessna 172s and 182s were optimal for my travel in the western states. As soon as Cessna introduced the 172 RG, I purchased one and flew more than 300 hours the first year I had it, picking up an instrument rating and using it for my business flying.

For me, the learning never really ends. After the Cutlass, my next aircraft was a new Beech Bonanza A36 in 2003. This really took me into the world of high-performance, complex single-engine aircraft—and, of course, the Garmin GNS530/430 combination. I now fly my Bonanza more than 200 hours a year.

While I weighed the idea of stepping up to a multi-engine aircraft, I elected to get a multiengine rating, which was an altogether enjoyable process over a long weekend with ATP in Richmond, Virginia.

Of course the learning continues. I even have an invitation to get checked out on floats!

What I hope, as you read each and every issue of *AOPA Flight Training*, is that you focus on what a wonderful difference being a pilot could make in your life. And, if you already are a pilot, then imagine a new rating or a new type of aircraft that might provide new challenges and new destinations. You will find a great deal of information about exploring flying at our new Let’s Go Flying Web site (www.LetsGoFlying.com). Join thousands who are visiting the site every week online. It is designed to help others discover what you and I have already learned—that general aviation can change your life. Depending on your focus, it can help you fulfill the dream of taking to the sky or improve your life by helping you leap great distances in a short amount of time—providing access to new business opportunities or a vacation home. We owe it to others to help them explore all that general aviation has to offer.

Introducing others to general aviation will help us reverse the decline in the pilot population, something that should concern us all. Reversing that trend is one of AOPA’s biggest challenges. In the coming months I will share with you ways that we can work together to improve general aviation across all fronts.

As I look back on another remarkable year of flying, the one thing I know for certain is that the year ahead will bring new and more exciting adventures. I know this, because it has been something I have focused on since I started flying—and I have yet to be disappointed. 