

History Lesson: Geoff Aitken.

When the editor of the Antique Flyer was honouring us with his presence recently, he argued that recent contributions had come from the young members and prior to that the women. It would have been a good idea to get some stories from other antique members and he couldn't think of anyone more antique than Edith or me (I haven't quite worked out what he meant) however in a moment of weakness I agreed.

There will be quite a few members of our age group that will be able to relate to this article and it may show the younger ones how things have changed — not always for the better I'm afraid.

Edith was always interested in aero planes, being a bit of a tomboy and having both her brothers in law in the RAAF in the last war may have been a bit of an influence.

Towards the end of the war she joined the air observers corp. in Bendigo. After the war two Bendigo ex pilots bought a Tiger Moth and without her parents knowledge she would ride her pushbike out to their paddock and spend her pocket money on joy rides. Unfortunately, one of the pilots crashed and was killed- so that ended that episode.

It started again in 1957 when she started training with Gertrude McKenzie's Flying School in Moorabbin. She would go by train on Friday night to Melbourne, stay with her sister at Brighton, fly on Sat. and Sun. if the weather was good and go back to Bendigo on the Sunday night. Moorabbin at that time was an all aver field, with the tower using lights if needed. No strips, taxiways contra rotating circuits, radios and so called - -improvements.

Her logbook makes interesting reading. Roy Goon was CFI at that time. Eileen Steenson's name appears, also M. Folks and Jack Garden. If the young readers don't know these names then ask an older member-they were by words in their day.

Another interesting entry in 1960 is an endorsement to fly a Tiger Moth from the front seat. I know we all do it but I wonder how many private pilots have an official endorsement. In 1960 a flying school started in Bendigo and Edith started flying their DH 82 and we will leave her story for the moment.

Like Edith, I have been interested in aeroplanes for as long as I can remember. I don't know what kindled this interest as none of my friends or relations in those schoolboy days flew. I don't think I had any relatives in the air force during the war; it was just there. I cut out all the pictures and information about aircraft that appeared in the papers and posted them in scrapbooks. There must have been hundreds of pictures and articles and I often wonder what happened to them, as they would be of great interest now.

My father died in 1947 when I was 15 and I had to run a farm and raise a family. By 1961 when the flying school was operating in Bendigo, things were under control on the farm and the siblings were self-supporting; so I decided to learn to fly. If I had any sense I would have taken up golf, bowls or even flower arranging, as you will soon learn.

Flying came easily to me and within a few hours I could do steep turns, spins, stalls and almost anything at all which really pleased my instructor the late Dick Arthur. The only thing I couldn't do was land; it drove Dick mad. My landings weren't even semi-controlled crashes according to Dick. I can't put into a family magazine how he described them. I told him once that when I messed up a landing I got confused. He said WHY? I replied that when things went wrong I didn't know whether I was Arthur or Martha and when I looked in the front cockpit and saw Arthur there I went to pieces.

It may help some student pilot having trouble with landing to know that my logbook shows 29 hours dual before I went solo and about 20 years before I could do 2

landings out of 3 that were reasonable. However in nearly 40 years of flying I have never damaged an aircraft; so don't give up - it will eventually come to you
The strange thing about my landings is that ever since Edith and I started flying together is that Edith, who does beautiful landings, has always handed over to me if the conditions are shocking; crosswind, no visibility in rain, strip too short etc. I haven't worked out if she has faith in me or she wants to blame me if the aircraft is wrecked.

I got my private licence early in 1963 and an old mate, the late Clive Hercus who had a restricted licence and I bought VH-AKE and moved it up to Prairie where it still resides. Incidentally, we paid 700 pound (\$1400) for it Les Penna bought Dick Arthur's Tiger Moth VH-BGO. So that means I learnt to fly in AKE and still own it. This is a total of over 38 years flying the one aircraft. Not a record I'm sure, but not many people learnt to fly in and still fly the same machine over that time frame. Remember the Edith I mentioned at the start of this article; well she now pops up again. With the sale of both Tigers from the flying school she has nothing to fly. Setting her agile brain into action she reasoned that-if she became friendly with me she might be allowed to hire AKE, her favourite Tiger. She did this for some time then thought of a way to do all the flying she wanted for free. I didn't stand a bloody chance and the rest as they say is history. We've flown AKE over a lot of SE Australia; Tiger races from Newcastle '78 and '80, into Parafield in '68- I'll tell you about that when the statute of limitations has run out. Edith won the Dolly Derby at Mangalore in '68; a pylon race for women pilots in 6 different types of aircraft and also took part in the all women's air show at Berwick in 1970. We were guests of IPEC at the opening of their freight line at Essendon in 1978. These are just a few of the highlights of the first part of our flying. In 1974 we wanted to go further a field and bought RFF a Cessna 180, which we still own and fly. In it we have covered most of Australia but I'll save that story for another day when I owe the editor another favour. WE fly the C 180 the same way we fly the Tiger. Basically, if we want to go somewhere we fill it up and go. That's what we did in the Tiger 40 years ago and we can't see any reason to change. One big difference we noted is the change in attitude among many pilots. I'm not referring to AAAA pilots who appreciate the older values, as can be seen at the flying and gathering of older aircraft. Many GA pilots seem so serious and try to be professional. If you don't believe me, or in the case of the younger ones who have never known anything different, just sit on the aerodrome fence, preferably near a refuelling site, for an hour or so on a busy day and watch carefully. Most aircraft will land, refuel, tie down and the pilot will head for the car park and not have spoken to anyone. When we started flying, as you taxied to the fuel, someone would come out, grab a wing tip and help you refuel. A couple more would wander over and ask you where you came from, where you were going, did you want a lift into town etc. Someone was certain to know someone you knew and it was surprising what local knowledge you could pick up. Of course when they came to your aerodrome you would do the same for them. Today the pilots seem too busy updating flight plans etc and the locals can't be bothered.

When Edith and I go somewhere, we try to find the time to walk up the flight line and see if we know any aircraft and stick our heads inside hangers to see what is there. Nearly always we will find an aircraft we know or a person we haven't seen in a long time and we've had lots of pleasant surprises.

Don't get too serious; after all flying is meant to be FUN and meeting people is half the fun

Geoff Aitken.