

Rising Tide School

I want to Fly--A Story of a Circle School Student

This inspiring story is from our sister Sudbury school in Pennsylvania, The Circle School.

Shaun Slade was 12 years old when he said "I want to fly." Over the next few weeks, he and the Source Clerk talked and brainstormed and decided that a good place to start would be to somehow place Shaun around airplanes and pilots. Sounds like an airport, they thought, so they called one up on the phone and asked if Shaun could be an intern there, working without pay, doing whatever he could do to be useful. No, said the airport. That won't fly.

So Shaun and the Source Clerk tried another airport—this time a small, privately owned airstrip. Sure, said the owner, let's talk about it. And what is this Circle School, anyway?

Shaun went to the airport once a week, that first year, and Matt and Andy went, too. Shaun remembers that he swept the floor a lot, and the sorted nuts and bolts, and he tightened screws one day for six hours straight. Sounds mundane? Maybe so, but the floors he swept were underneath airplanes, and the screws that he tightened were on a reconstructed World War II fighter plane. Didn't seem mundane to Shaun. He loved it.

Matt and Andy stopped going, after that first year, but Shaun continued when school started again. He helped assemble an aluminum wing for a Percival Provost airplane. He learned sheet metal working, machining, welding, woodworking, painting, airplane fabric overing (sic), and on and on. Occasionally on weekends—Bingo!—the owner took Shaun flying.

The second summer, Shaun worked at the airport, for pay, and the next year, at age 14, he started flying. At 15, he began formal lessons, which he paid for entirely out of his wages. At 16, he was part of a team that won a "Golden Wrench Award" in a national competition among antique airplane restorers.

After Shaun left The Circle School he went to work at the airport full-time and he took some community college classes. At 18 years old he got his student license, and at 19—ta-da!—Shaun was a licensed airplane pilot. For his last year at the airport, he was manager of a corporate division.

The story doesn't end there. Shaun is now attending Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona, Florida, where he will earn a four-year college degree and a commercial pilot's license. By this summer he hopes to have his instrument certificate. In the fall he expects to work on his multi-engine rating, and then he'll become a Certified Flight Instructor. Who knows what will come next? For Shaun, the sky's the limit.

Ten Thousand Stories

Shaun's story is fun to tell and inspiring to hear. But what if his interest had ended after a month? Or after that first year? What if he had never taken lessons and never gotten his pilot's license? What if he had later pursued microbiology instead of aviation? Would Shaun's airport internship then have been a failure? And what about Matt and Andy? Was the enterprise just a waste of time for them?

For every story like Shaun's—a passionate interest, pursued as far as the chase can go—there are ten thousand stories of interests developed less deeply, and then apparently dropped, or developed just as deeply but without the drama or outward visibility of aviation.

Those ten thousand untold stories weave the fabric of life at The Circle School. There's the girl who dissected a cow eyeball, and found that she didn't like it. There's the boy who played with a guitar for a couple of months, never to become a rock star. There's the child who wandered in and helped build the new workbench in the art room, exploring an interest in screwdrivers for a few minutes.

And then there's Matt, who tagged along with Shaun.

Turns out Matt learned about tool-and-die work during that internship, and enjoyed it. Would you believe that today he's a professional tool and die maker? He's not, but you found it believable, didn't you? The point is that it doesn't matter. No matter what Matt is doing today, he experienced genuine interest, developed it to his own satisfaction, detected that he was through with that interest for the time being, and redirected his attention to other pursuits, having been expanded by his knowledge of tool and die making. It was an experience of self-direction, concentration, acquisition of knowledge about technology—and about himself.

Every interest pursued—for a moment or a lifetime, regardless of the subject—is an educational success. Of course, in today's world, unlike even a few decades ago, virtually any interest,

passionately pursued, can provide not only personal satisfaction, but also career possibilities.

So the moral of Shaun's delightful story is not that kids should pursue their interests because it might lead to a career, or even a lifelong interest. The moral is that the joy is in the pursuit—at every step—and the education is manifold: expanded knowledge and personal boundaries, learning about resources and how to learn, and the love of the chase.