

An Eye-Opening Experience

Nate Saint peered eagerly over the edge of his big brother Sam's Challenger biplane. His heart thumped against his ribs in anticipation of takeoff.

"You ready for this, Thanny?" Sam asked, affectionately using his little brother's nickname. Nate nodded enthusiastically. "Well then, off we go!"

Sam adjusted his goggles and glanced back to be sure Nate was strapped securely in place in the open cockpit. Nate grinned, and Sam grinned back. Then the engine sputtered and roared to life. They were on their way.

The year was 1930, and Nate was only seven years old. But as he felt the jolt of takeoff in the pit of his stomach and watched the airstrip drop away beneath him, he knew exactly what he wanted from life. This was his first flight, but it certainly wouldn't be his last. Nate was destined and determined to spend his life around airplanes.

Sam waved his arm toward the landscape below. "Take a look, Thanny. Anything look familiar?"

As Sam banked the biplane and flew over their town of Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, Nate could make out familiar landmarks. He saw the Presbyterian Church

where his family attended services every Sunday and Wednesday. He saw the schoolhouse where his friends would be amazed to hear about his latest adventure. Then Sam turned the plane slightly and pointed down. There was the Saint house, with his father's workshop and the giant wooden roller coaster in the back yard. Nate smiled. Even from the air, his house looked like a great place to live.

“Wow,” was all Nate could manage to say.

Nate's house was anything but ordinary. His parents, Lawrence and Katherine Saint, loved their children and believed they should be free to dream big dreams and try to achieve them. Lawrence was an artist, and Katherine was the daughter of an inventor. When their children came up with wild schemes—such as sleeping on the roof or building a huge model railroad—Lawrence and Katherine rarely said no. Instead, they would help make their children's dreams and schemes a reality. With a working roller coaster, beds on the roof, and another interesting project always in the works, the Saint household was an exciting place to be.

While traditional rules like mealtime and bedtime were rarely observed, following God's laws was a big deal in the Saint household. Sundays were always regarded as the Lord's Day. The family woke early and had breakfast together. Then they attended Sunday School and church services. After church, they ate lunch together and had a time of family prayer and

Bible study. They also went to Sunday night services and Wednesday evening Bible study as a family.

During the rest of the week, when he wasn't riding the roller coaster, sleeping on the roof, or swinging from the giant tree swing, Nate loved to build models of all sorts of things. With his brothers, Ben and Phil, Nate built a huge, working model railroad. By himself, Nate built a six-foot-long glider that really flew. He usually didn't have directions or kits for building what he made; he just looked at pictures of what he wanted to build, and somehow he knew exactly what to do.

In addition to building things, Nate was always inventing. He liked to take old things and make them new again. He liked to find things that worked well and make them work even better. He also liked to come up with brand new ideas and find ways to make them work. Nate's inventions were so good and useful, some of them won awards at local hobby shows before he turned ten years old.

As the plane descended and taxied to a stop that day in 1930, Nate was in love with flying. He lingered in the cockpit, reverently touching the controls and examining the gauges. Sam climbed from the plane and leaned on the edge of the open cockpit.

“What do you say, Thanny? You like it?”

Nate nodded. “It's the greatest feeling in the world!”

“I agree,” Sam said, lifting Nate from the cockpit and ruffling his hair affectionately. “Now, let's go get

some dinner. I do believe I could smell Mama's gravy from a thousand feet up."

Nate grinned. With one last longing look at the biplane, he followed his brother. But in his heart he said a little prayer that it wouldn't be long before he would be flying again. In just a few years, Nate's dream came true.

When Nate was ten, he took his second airplane ride with Sam. Sam's new plane was a 1933 Stinson with an enclosed cockpit. Even better, in this new type of plane, the pilot and co-pilot or passenger sat side by side.

"I've been reading about flying," Nate told Sam.

Sam grinned at him. "Got the flying bug, have you? Well, today we might just see how much you've learned from those books of yours."

As Sam prepared for takeoff, Nate watched him closely. They taxied down the runway and climbed into the sky. Nate checked every gauge and observed every needle. He drank in every move Sam made, making mental notes of proper procedures and comparing his mental notes to what he had read.

Sam noticed Nate's attention to detail and obvious love of flying. He remembered feeling that way himself, many years ago. When the plane was high above the green grid of farms and pastures, Sam turned to Nate with a smile.

"Okay, little brother. Let's see what you can do," Sam said.

“What?”

“Take the controls, Thanny. Let’s see if you’ve learned anything from all your studying.”

“Really?” Nate was thrilled and terrified, all at once. “I have the controls?”

“She’s all yours,” Sam said, lacing his fingers behind his head and leaning back.

Nate could hardly believe it. He stretched his feet to reach the pedals and gripped the control wheel. When he pulled back gently on the wheel, the little plane climbed toward the clouds. When he pushed forward, the nose dipped toward the landscape below. Nate’s whole body tingled with excitement and he laughed out loud. He was flying! But Nate Saint’s journey was only beginning.

“This is the best day of my life,” Nate told Sam as he made the plane dip and turn. “I want to fly forever and ever and ever!”

“I’m glad you’re enjoying yourself,” Sam said with a chuckle. “But I don’t think the fuel will last forever and ever and ever. Or didn’t you read about fuel gauges in those books of yours?”

“You know what I mean,” Nate protested, laughing.

“Yes,” Sam said. “I know exactly what you mean.”

From that day on, flying and airplanes were Nate’s first love. He read about planes, talked about planes, built model planes, and dreamed about planes. Nate knew God had a plan for his life, and he was sure flying would be part of that plan. He could hardly

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wait to ride in a plane again and maybe even to take the controls. And someday, he hoped he would have a chance to fly a plane of his very own.