



**LINDA AND GLEN ANDERSON** with their 1966 Cessna 172, *Red Bird*.

# AMERICAN GOTHIC

## PILOTS OF MADISON COUNTY

**"Y**ou forget how humid the Midwest is compared to Arizona!" said Jean. Sweat streaked our faces as we climbed from the *Flying Carpet* in rural Winterset, Iowa. Bound for a wedding in Chicago, we'd been enticed to Winterset Municipal by a photo of Glen and Linda Anderson that suggested Grant Wood's iconic painting, *American Gothic*. These modern-day farmers,

however, posed with an airplane instead of pitchforks. I was examining the only other airplane on the ramp, a rare but derelict pressurized Mooney M22 Mustang, when the Andersons drove up.

"Welcome to Madison County!" said Linda. "The main covered bridge from the movie is just a few miles away. And John Wayne was born here in Winterset." Following introductions, they helped install our airplane amid undergrowth in an aging doorless hangar. Then they introduced *Red Bird*, their crimson 1966 Cessna 172 purchased for just \$27,000. I appreciate practical airplanes that every-day people can afford.

"Shall we dine in town? Or grill steaks from beef raised on our farm?" asked Linda, checking her watch. "Winterset has a really good Pizza Hut," added Glen.

"Let's eat at your farm," said Jean, sidestepping Glen's hint. "Nothing beats Iowa steaks!" I'd expected flat, open fields like those in Illinois where Jean and I grew up, but instead we traveled densely wooded hills to the Anderson farmhouse. Inside, stuffed animal heads peered from the walls.

"Iowa is popular for deer hunting," explained Glen, "though I bagged the moose in Wyoming. It's a 'Boone and Crocket' award winner!" Stiff from seven

hours aloft, Jean and I attempted a walk while our hosts prepared dinner, but heat and humidity soon urged us back. Over steaks, salad, and ice cream, Glen and Linda shared flying stories.

Glen earned his pilot certificate in 2007 at age 60, after first training in the 1970s. Linda qualified a year later at age 60 with 70 flight hours, only the second woman to earn a certificate out of Winterset Airport.

"If I could tell student pilots one thing," said Linda, "it would be don't give up. Finishing is so worth it! Many times I felt like quitting, like I'd never 'get it.' But every struggle is a learning experience, and finally it clicked. It took me 25 hours to solo, but then I didn't want to land!" She was equally enthused about her first solo cross-country. "Unfortunately, no one was at my destination to sign my logbook or witness my best landing to date. So I took a cell-phone picture to document my airplane parked at the airport."

*Red Bird* joined the family while Linda was still training. Since then, the couple has flown throughout Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, and Michigan. They plan an anniversary flight to Pioneer Village in Minden, Nebraska.

"What a privilege and joy it is, to fly whenever we want!" said Linda. She laughingly told of another pilot who asked about *Red Bird's* ownership. "Glen answered, 'It's Linda's plane, and she lets me fly it!'" In fact, Glen and Linda share ownership, take turns flying, and cheer each other's piloting abilities.

Linda loves navigation. "It's like a puzzle below and I've always enjoyed assembling puzzles," she said. "Of course, GPS makes it easier, but I still like plotting my course and identifying checkpoints."

Glen, on the other hand, enjoys the challenge of crosswind landings. After the

### TRAVEL LOG: WINTERSET MUNICIPAL (3Y3)

**Runway:** 14/32, 3,000 by 50 feet  
**Elevation:** 1,110 feet  
**Location:** Two miles north of Winterset

**Address:** 3405 North 8th Avenue  
 Winterset, Iowa 50273  
**Phone:** 515-462-1811

**Extra:** Nearby attractions include actor John Wayne's birthplace and the covered bridges of Madison County.

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wind picked up one day while Linda was flying, he trained to land from the right seat should it ever become necessary. He doesn't plan to become a flight instructor but is safety-oriented after a career as a heavy-equipment operator.

Like many early farmhouses, the Andersons' features a hodgepodge of cozy rooms added piecemeal by previous owners.

"When we bought the farm this house was abandoned except for mice and raccoons," Glen said. "We made it habitable in two months but have spent a lifetime refurbishing it." He described such difficulties as running electrical wiring through 100-year-old solid lath-and-plaster walls.

Leading us upstairs to our room, Glen explained that only the downstairs has central air conditioning, so they'd turned on a nearby window unit and put a fan in our doorway to blow cool air in. When I turned down the fan later that night, a light went on in the next room. I couldn't resist waking Jean to demonstrate how with each fan-speed adjustment, the light's brightness changed.

"I'm treating you to the best breakfast in town," said Glen the next morning after Linda left for work. "Just keep in mind it's a very small town." After reassuring us it was safe to leave our suitcases in his pickup bed on the Madison County Courthouse Square, he led us to the Winterset Rexall's soda counter. Joining a raft of old-timers in farmer's caps and overalls, Glen and Jean ordered eggs, bacon, and hash browns.

"How's the oatmeal?" I asked, after watching the server scoop lard onto the griddle.

"Don't know," she answered. "No one ever orders it here."

It was already getting hot when Glen dropped us at the airport. "Stop back on your way home!" he shouted as I cranked the engine. Maybe I should run for politics. There's nothing like a flying carpet to win you friends in Iowa, and everywhere else. 🍪

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**Greg Brown** is author of numerous aviation books and former National Flight Instructor of the Year. Visit his website ([www.gregbrownflyingcarpet.com](http://www.gregbrownflyingcarpet.com)).

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