



GREG BROWN last engaged in aerial romance as a college student, shuttling between Champaign, Illinois, and Indianapolis to see his then-fiancée, Jean. www.GregBrownFlyingCarpet.com

“Would you and Rachel care to join us for breakfast?” I offered. “Grab a separate table if you like. We’ll sightsee Sedona on the way back.”

“That sounds awesome!” Andrew said. “And we’ll definitely join your table because Rachel is a very social person.” Later, Andrew texted downloaded photos of Payson Airport’s Crosswinds Restaurant. “Is this where we’re eating?” he asked. I replied affirmatively with restaurant views of the scenic Mogollon Rim. My friend’s enthusiasm made me feel increasingly honored that he’d involve me in such a personal mission.

When Andrew introduced me to Rachel at Flagstaff Pulliam Airport, I immediately saw the magic that attracted him to her. A dynamic, outgoing professional woman, Rachel sparkled with humor. When I cranked up the *Flying Carpet’s* radios, she asked, “Greg, are you gonna say that ‘copy, roger, affirmative, and negative’ stuff?”

“Indeed, I am,” I said. From then on, Rachel answered all in-flight questions using such terms. “Seatbelts on, everyone?” “Affirmative!” She sampled the controls on the 30-minute flight, while Andrew pointed out canyons he’d hiked and rock faces he’d climbed.

“I assume you want us to ‘play airplane,’” said Rachel when I photographed the pair at Payson Airport. So, they did. Over breakfast, Gary shared seaplane-flying exploits from his youth. Andrew enthused that his new job might enable him to earn his wings. And Rachel described the university writing courses she teaches, as well as her passion for crafting bolo ties.

Afterward, Andrew piloted us over Tonto Natural Bridge and the red rocks of Sedona, where I treated them to a landing. Steering homeward toward Flagstaff, Andrew noted a sheer pinnacle where he teaches beginners to climb.

After landing, I quizzed my friends about belongings they might have left in the airplane—explaining that Jean often forgets her cellphone there.

“You should add that to one of your little laminated checklists,” suggested Rachel with mirth. But I got the last laugh. Andrew hit the brakes while driving away; Rachel lowered her window and admitted, “I left my coffee mug in the plane.” Whether this couple lasts a day or forever, our lives are all richer for a joyful morning of laughter and flying. **FT**

SPECIAL GIRL

The romance of flight comes in many flavors, so when my friend Andrew requested a “huge favor,” I didn’t know what to expect.



Andrew and Rachel “play airplane” at Payson Airport, Arizona.

Andrew used to edit our local entertainment weekly, for which I’d provided aerial photos. An avid outdoorsman, he was eager to explore Arizona from above, so I’d invited him along on flights to Tucson and Lake Havasu City. Instantly he was hooked on both the views and the controls. But that was months ago.

“What’s this ‘huge favor?’” I asked.

“I’ve met this special girl, Rachel,” he replied, “and I’m planning fun things to do together. So suddenly I got this idea—would you consider taking us flying? It would be a total surprise for her.” Coincidentally, I already had a fitting mission planned: my semiannual rendezvous with buddy and former neighbor Gary at Payson Airport; Gary motorcycles from Phoenix, while I travel by *Flying Carpet*.