



One of **GREG BROWN'S** first-time passengers bragged to friends of getting sick in the airplane; he's now training to be an Air Force pilot. www.gregbrownflyingcarpet.com

BIG KIDS ALOFT

We relaxed with our son Hannis and his fiancée, Marissa, on Richmond Pond in western Massachusetts, our fourth flying destination crossing the continent from Arizona.

Marissa's parents, Alex and Sabina, had been consummate hosts, treating us to sight-seeing, concerts, and savory meals. Alex even let me drive his vintage Miata. In return, all he asked was to go flying. Alex had once taken lessons, but circumstances prevented him from finishing. Now he was eager to retake the controls. Once a pilot, always a pilot.

On the appointed morning, however, broken clouds shrouded the lush green mountaintops surrounding Pittsfield Municipal Airport, with no improvement expected. To our mutual disappointment, it wasn't safe to fly.

Midday came, and as I toted luggage to Hannis and Marissa's car for their drive home, sunlight momentar-



Alex (left) and Allen celebrate the flight at Pittsfield Municipal Airport in Massachusetts.

ily silvered Richmond Pond. Quietly, I checked weather. Area ceilings were indeed thinning, and had risen off all but the highest peaks. What's more, an amended forecast indicated continuing improvement. I asked Alex what was planned for the afternoon.

"Nothing until dinner," he replied.

"Then let's go flying!" Overcoming surprise, Alex phoned his friend Allen, who had previously asked to join us for the flight. Allen was new to light airplanes, so I mentioned possible bumpiness and that if ceilings lowered again we might need to cut short our flight.

"No way am I missing an airplane ride!" Allen replied. So we headed for the airport. Alex settled into the right seat, and Allen in back. Unfortunately, I took the wrong taxiway at the new-to-me airport, and ended up at the crosswind runway. The wind was too strong to pretend it was intentional and take off, so I swallowed my pride and backtracked to the correct runway. Fortunately, only I was disturbed. Shortly after takeoff, Alex took the controls.

Any blue-sky longings soon evaporated, as golden sunbeams pierced dark clouds to illuminate the beautiful Berkshires countryside. After circling Richmond Pond just across the ridge from the airport, Alex steered us west toward Albany and the Hudson River. En route, Allen, a retired book designer, regaled us with juicy gossip about celebrity authors he'd worked with. (He found Stephen King to be "a gentleman and a great guy." Sorry, my lips are sealed on Allen's more scandalous stories.)

"This is an hour's drive by car," enthused Allen when we intercepted the Hudson. "What did it take us to get here? Ten minutes?" We traced the scenic waterway northward to Saratoga Lake.

"I've always wanted to see Mount Greylock from the air," said Alex. Identifying the peak on my chart, I calculated a heading for my friend, who soon identified it visually. Clouds hugged the summit, but we eyed it as equals before steering back to Pittsfield. Although just an hour aloft, the flight proved memorable. Alex beamed following his stint at the controls, and I raved about the views. Allen, however, was elated.

"This flight was truly one of the high points in my life!" he exclaimed. "I can't wait to tell my grandchildren about it—though I'm the one who feels like the little kid!" **FT**