



TYLER ALLEN at Embry-Riddle Flight Exploration Camp, Prescott, Arizona (left) and at music camp (above).

SOARING TO SUMMER CAMP

THE SWEET MELODY OF FLIGHT

T Tyler Allen beamed as we cleared the ridge west of Window Rock Airport. Behind us in the baggage compartment, the high-school junior’s viola, bedding, and duffel bag promised musical adventure. After months of scholarship applications and paperwork, Tyler was en route to Northern Arizona University’s Curry Summer Music Camp. I transferred the controls to my young friend, who leveled us at 8,500 feet and steered over the Navajo Nation toward Flagstaff.

“Greg, do you know when to test the ELT?” Tyler asked, pointing to the emergency locator transmitter switch on the *Flying Carpet’s* instrument panel. Before I could answer, he cited the regulations on how often to check it, and at what time during the hour. “I’ve been studying for my pilot written test,” he boasted.

“Are you excited about music camp, Tyler?” I asked.

“Yes, Greg, but I’m nervous about tomorrow’s audition!” We’d recently learned that just one orchestra would encompass student musicians of all levels

this summer. While Tyler had studied viola for only a year, other attendees would likely include seasoned players bound for college music programs.

“Tyler, you may feel challenged, but don’t get discouraged; you’re a talented musician and the camp teachers are terrific. You’ll catch up and do great.”

A month earlier when Tyler’s spring semester ended, he’d discovered that his school viola wasn’t available for summer camp. Tapping my own long-ago violin training, I’d located a viola online and had it sent to him. When it arrived, however,

Tyler revealed that like many first-year string students he’d not learned to tune it.

The Navajo Nation is no hotbed of orchestra expertise, so from 150 miles away I’d emailed Tyler viola-tuning videos and iPod apps. When those weren’t enough, I offered to teach him via Skype. But my old violin’s sad state of closet-induced disrepair rendered that impossible. After two days on the phone, I finally located a suitable viola teacher in nearby Gallup, New Mexico.

“Tyler, this’ll cheer you up if you’re playing catch-up at music camp: Next month at Embry-Riddle Flight Exploration Camp, you’ll be the one ahead of everyone else.”

“Really? You think so?”

“Sure, many of those kids will never have piloted an airplane before, or will have only a few hours at the controls. But you’ve flown lots with me, and all over the Southwest with our buddy Adriel in his Flight Design CT and the Navajo Nation tribal King Airs. How many other high-schoolers have flown a turboprop?”

“Heh! Not many,” he said. “I guess I will be one of the more experienced pilots at flight camp. I’m looking forward to that!”

Jean and I spiced Tyler’s Flagstaff music-camp stay by treating him to Thai

TRAVEL LOG: ST. GEORGE MUNICIPAL AIRPORT (SGU)

Runways: 1/19, 9,300 by 150 feet
Elevation: 2,884 feet

Location: Five miles south-east of St. George

Extra: St. George’s Zion National Park is famous for sandstone cliffs of cream, pink, and red.

COURTESY EMBRY-RIDDLE FLIGHT EXPLORATION CAMP

food, sushi, and Delhi-Indian cuisine—fare not found on the Navajo Nation. We went fishing and visited violinmaker Jeff Robinson to adjust Tyler's viola.

"How can you tell the difference between a violinist and a fiddler?" Jeff asked. "The violinist brags about how *much* she paid for her instrument, while the fiddler brags about how *little* he paid for his." Later that week, Tyler performed Tchaikovsky with the summer-camp orchestra. When his family joined us for the final Beethoven concert, all of us were stunned by his amazing progress in just two weeks.

The following month, I retrieved Tyler at Window Rock for his next adventure. To avoid midday heat, we flew early in the morning back to Flagstaff and then raced a thunderstorm over Mingus Mountain to Prescott. After touring Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University's western campus together, I left Tyler for a week of ground school, simulator, and flight training. He'd pilot a night excursion to Scottsdale and a round-trip journey over the Grand Canyon to St. George, Utah.

"You were right, Greg," said Tyler, flying us home afterward from Prescott to Window Rock, "I was the most experienced pilot there. One student even got sick on the first flight and had to fly alone with an instructor for a few days to get comfortable." Tyler's dream to become a professional pilot now burns brighter than ever, and he hopes to earn his degree at Embry-Riddle. "This was an awesome summer, Greg!" he said when we parted. "I just wish it wasn't over!"

"It's been a blast for me, too, Tyler. And thanks to you, Jeff Robinson is refurbishing my violin!" Soon Tyler was sending me duets to learn, and I was gifting classical music for his iPod. Picture this Navajo kid hanging out with his buddies after school; while the rest are sampling hip-hop on their music players, he's groovin' to Bach, and plotting his course to see the world from a cockpit. 🐉

Greg Brown is an aviation author, photographer, and former National Flight Instructor of the Year. Visit his website (www.gregbrownflyingcarpet.com).
