

A Flight of Passage

By Rinker Buck

By Chris Hope, Master CFI

A fantasy that will never come true for me is a flight in a rag-and-tube aircraft from coast to coast. And not just any aircraft. One that is equipped and outfitted with just the very basic flying necessities. We don't need no silly electrical system. No radios, nav or otherwise. No cel phones, no iPads, no GPS's. Just give me a sectional and a whiskey compass to navigate by, and tach, fuel gauge, oil pressure and temp gauges, and I would be happy. (OK, a credit card in my pocket would be nice as well.) And wouldn't it be fun to do this as a teenager with brother in an airplane that the two of you built together.

There are a couple of reasons why this fantasy is out of my reach. I don't have a brother and it has been a long time since I saw the age of 15. But this was the adventure of Rinker Buck, and he tells his story in "*Flight of Passage*"

This book has been around for about 15 years, but I just recently came across it. Rinker Buck tells of listening to the stories of his barnstorming father when he was a little kid and his dad traded the flying circus days for mundane office work of New York City. He tells of flying with his dad and his older brother during the 1950's when Class A-B-C-X-Y-Z airspace was an unknown.

The idea was Rinker's brother's, and it came out of an act of teen-age defiance as so many ideas do when kids are that age. But after an initial round of head-butting between teenagers and Dad, Dad agreed that it might be ok for fifteen-year old boy to join his seventeen-year old brother in their rural New Jersey barn for a winter of aircraft rebuilding. And then it might be fun for

the two of them to take off for California to visit their uncle. What could go wrong?

Anyone who has built or re-built an aircraft knows what can go wrong. But even with school and chores, the two of them (and their sister) stripped and rebuilt a J-3 Cub, including all of the recovering over one winter.

And then, a Fourth of July weekend, and it is time pull out the sectional, find a river to follow, and light out to the southwest.

This is a charming story of flying though the Mississippi valley, Texas, and the southwest. Of meeting with crop dusters, Texas girls on horseback, and dropping Moon Pies on prairie dogs.

But it also a story of growing up, of coming to terms with the different personality of brother and sister, of coming to the realization that Dad and Mom are more than just Dad and Mom. All of us in adulthood eventually realize the Dad and Mom were people just like us. They were kids with dreams and adventures, they were young adults with the anxieties of new parents, and they were older adults with the pressures and pains of jobs and dreams unfulfilled.

Rinker Buck writes this memoir after the passage of enough years to allow him to hone his writing skills and see himself with a bit of distance. But the charm and excitement of so many years ago still shine through.

Follow your dreams.

Fly safe.