

Frank H. Smith Jr.

5/8/23 – 11/2/10

I am Frank Smith III, the son of Frank Smith Jr. My purpose in writing this is to provide a little insight into my father's life.

So I will begin by telling you that he was born in La Porte, Texas on May 8th, 1923. Unfortunately, I cannot tell you a great deal about his childhood because he never shared much about this with me. However with some research I was able to find out that on April Fool's Day 1939 dad took his first plane ride. That was all it took to begin his love affair with flying. On June 24th, 1939 dad and his father, Frank Sr., soloed. Later Frank Sr. would own and operate the Smith Flying School in Aransas Pass, Texas. On September 2nd, 1941 dad earned his private pilot's license. Of course he would go on to log over 29,000 hours flying! His career included everything from barnstorming in biplanes to flying Boeing 737's.

Also during his high school days I found out that dad was the editor of the Aransas Pass yearbook, "The Prowl." While he was editor he also contributed articles and much of the art work. In addition, he was the art editor for their newsletter, "Panther Scream." Little did I know that dad had artistic abilities. This is also something he never talked about.

The flying stories he did tell me were about some of his experiences while he was a cadet in the Army Air Corp along with a few stories about crop dusting in a Stearman. He was an instructor during the Second World War. One of his greatest disappointments was when he was in line to take the training in the P-51 to become a combat pilot. He had his orders rescinded just before he was to go into training. The army decided that since he already had a great deal of civilian time as an instructor, they needed him to teach new cadets to fly. So no P-51 for dad. The closest he got was in the AT-6.

Another flying story that I found very interesting was about the time when he was hired to herd blackbirds. The blackbirds would swoop down on the crops and devastate them. Dad's job was to fly down low just over the crops and chase the birds away.

Dad married my mother, Rheabelle McFarland on April 1st, 1946. This marriage was to last over 60 years! I was born on June 25, 1947.

The other things that I remember the most were the boating trips to Canyon and Saguaro lakes. Dad took great pride in his Dorset cabin cruiser. We would fish, swim and water ski. Many times we would go far up into the lake and camp out over night. There would be dad, mom, Penny, the Dachshund and me. This would have been the early 60's.

Of course my favorite memories were about the flying. Dad took me up for my first flight while I was still in grade school. He borrowed Fletcher Huskie's Globe Swift. We took off from Sky Harbor and headed over to our neighborhood in Phoenix. This was way before there was anything called a Class B airspace. Dad banked the plane and we circled over the house. I'm not real sure at this point, but I think mom came out and waved. Later he let me handle the controls just a bit and did I have a story to tell back at school.

When I was 15 dad enrolled me in a ground school course taught by a fellow Frontier pilot Wes Morris. While I was learning about aerodynamics and meteorology dad was giving me dual instruction in a Cessna 150. I soloed on my 16th birthday at Falcon Field in Mesa, Ariz. Now here is an interesting fact about my instructor. He was a 4th generation pilot trained by Wiley Post. By that I mean Wiley taught the guy who taught the guy who taught the guy who taught my father to fly. Shortly after I got my private license dad bought a Stinson 108-3 so I could get some tail dragger time. Dad took me through my commercial license in that plane.

My most recent memories of flying with dad were mostly on what he used to call the "\$100 breakfasts." We would fly to locations within the state. I would fly down, we would have breakfast, and he would fly us back. At this point we were flying in the Bellanca Super Viking. Dad was very proud of this plane. It was one that had a great reputation with pilots. We would get many compliments on this plane. This pleased dad immensely. These trips were also fulfilling a fantasy for me. I didn't get to experience the early Frontier days much because I was too young to remember much of what that was like. So on these trips around the state I would ask dad many questions about what flying the route was like in the DC-3s. It was like I got to be dad's copilot on the old routes. Now I know he never said much about this to me, he was never very forthcoming with sharing his emotions but the one time I saw him tear up was when I gave him a birthday card where I told

him how much it meant for me to be his copilot on these trips. This touched him.

I was honored to be a passenger on the 737 when dad took his retirement flight for Frontier. There was a small reception for him. At the time he was the number one pilot on the 737. Now I can tell you this, every time I see a Boeing 737 fly over, I think with pride, “my dad used to fly one of those!” In my way of thinking, dad now can fly whatever he wants.

Dad wanted to be next to mom when he died. So dad and mom’s ashes will be interred at the National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona on December 6, 2010. He will have an honor guard and the presentation of the flag.

