

Dream Take Flight

An Adventure Memoir



Lisa Turner

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ISBN-13:

ISBN-10:

Library of Congress Control Number:

This book is memoir. It reflects the author's present recollections of
experiences over time. Some names and characteristics have been changed,
some events have been compressed or moved in time, and some dialogue has
been recreated.

This book is designed to provide inspiration as well as entertainment to my
readers. It is sold with the understanding that I am not trying to render
psychological, legal, or any other kind of professional advice. The content of
each chapter is the sole expression and opinion of its author. No warranties or
guarantees are expressed or implied by the goal setting procedures outlined in
this book.

[INSIDE FRONT COVER]
WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

Dream Take Flight is the story of how Lisa Turner built an experimental airplane in her garage in the 1990s and flew it from Florida to Maine and back.

Lisa grew up playing with the boys and skipping school. She dreamed of spaceships and airplanes in a time when girls were supposed to learn how to cook and start families.

When her mother becomes ill and dies, Lisa is thrown into a world of confusion. Shy and introverted, Lisa makes the difficult journey to self-confidence through actualizing her childhood dreams, driven by the last words of her mother.

The “why” is as much fun as the “how” with humor infused stories of how Lisa overcame self-doubt working in a man’s world. Self-Empowerment finally comes to a once awkward and self-conscious woman.

Lisa provides a bonus for readers at the end of her story. Realizing that others may want to use the same tools that she did, Lisa provides an easy to follow blueprint for discovering life purpose and setting goals. It doesn’t have to be an airplane!

Foreword

Anyone who's ever had doubts about whether they can make their dreams come true should read this book. Dream Take Flight is a story about overcoming daunting odds to achieve the near impossible: A young girl in a difficult family situation, facing a scary world and uncertain future, makes up her mind that someday she will fly her own plane. It's not an easy path. On her own, she faces one challenge after another. But she perseveres, and in the end, not only does she fly her own plane, she actually builds it. Then she sets out on an epic solo flight. A tale of courage, iron will and pure grit, Lisa Turner's journey from dream to reality does not disappoint. It's the great American story with a twist, and an inspiration to young people -- especially young women-- everywhere.

~ Granville Toogood, best-selling author and winner of the McGraw-Hill 2017 Business Classics award. March 19, 2019, Ocean Ridge, Florida.

We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.

~ Winston Churchill

Preface

This book is for anyone who has ever set their sights on the improbable.

Since building and flying the Pulsar, I've wanted to write a story. I began writing snippets during my Pulsar cross country, and then a series of articles for Kitplanes Magazine in the 1990s. The experience was so life changing that I kept writing stories until I had about ten chapters. Then I wondered if anyone would really be interested, and the project fell into the cracks between careers.

In 2017, twenty years later, I picked it up again, not being able to forget the lessons or the spectacular excitement.

I realized that the Pulsar story wasn't complete without explaining to the reader why I built an airplane in my garage in the first place. This took me on a wild ride through my childhood years.

I have three reasons for writing this book.

The first is to get the memories out on paper. The cathartic relief allowing these words to spill out onto the page provided both closure and appreciation.

The second is the hope that you – the reader - will read it and decide to do something you've always wanted to do. It doesn't have to be building and flying an airplane, it can be anything you really care about. To this end I've included chapters at the end of the book to serve as stepping stones for your own journey.

The third reason is to celebrate an unconventional path for women of all ages. A tomboy at heart, I never understood why I couldn't take shop class, be a mechanic, or build an airplane.

Since I wrote the first article on building an airplane in *KITPLANES* magazine in 1996, I have had the opportunity through the Experimental Aircraft Association to help other people build and fly their projects. The encouragement and joy that flows from helping others accomplish their goals will always be the reward that I seek in sharing the stories.

I hope *Dream Take Flight* gives you an insight, a chuckle, or a big dream to pursue.

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Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.

~ Helen Keller

PROLOGUE

Was the day starting out all wrong?

The sun's corona, still below the horizon, glowed a luminous yellow through a thick veil to the east. The forest canopy below my craft seemed alive as clouds parted and then reattached themselves to the tree tops. Damp air snaked through the air vents as I held the control stick in a tight grip.

The instruments glowed in muted reds and greens on the panel, a measure of reassurance that would not last long.

I looked down at a pockmarked expanse of pine forest and glimmering pools. With alligators cruising through the ragged islands of tall grass and stagnant water, this would not be a comforting place for an emergency landing.

Tendrils of mist elongated and began to obscure the landscape below. Islands of dark cloud reached down from above. What had been a kernel of doubt now blossomed into a jagged chunk of fear as I observed the fast-moving darkness close in.

Trapped.

I took a deep breath and willed calm into my growing panic. I pushed the control stick forward, descending to 500 feet, trying to find a channel of visibility.

The sun materialized slowly in the east, a multicolor aura circling a bright yellow core. Fingers of peach colored light reached out and touched the shiny white wings of the Pulsar.

What should I do?

The ground haze continued to grow, moving in patches, as the upper masses of cloud stood their ground. Technically I was still VFR (Visual Flight Rules) – having the ground in sight, one mile of visibility, and clear of clouds. Barely. I took in another gulping breath, feeling the sharp edges of failure.

In flight training they tell you that multiple small mistakes in judgement add up until you have a serious set of problems. In training I always vowed to not get myself into a dangerous situation.

Climb.

I pointed the nose of the little airplane up into a narrow channel of clear sky and applied power. I leveled off at 1000 feet. I could no longer see the ground, except for holes scattered in the clouds. The silver sheen of the swamp pools reached up to my airplane in dancing beams, as if to draw me down and in.

Disappointment joined the knot of fear. *The day I've dreamt about my whole life. What am I going to do?*

I banked my little craft to the right, changing course one hundred and eighty degrees, heading back the way I had come, threading my way down through the gaps in the dark twisting cloud banks as rain began to splatter loudly on the canopy.

"You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose. You're on your own, and you know what you know. And you are the one who'll decide where you go." ~ Dr. Seuss

1. DREAMS

1963

The night air shimmered in mist and the pungent aroma of pine permeated the dampness. My bare feet sank into the emerald moss carpet of the forest, soft and lush. I spanned a moonlit cathedral clearing in six strides and re-entered the grove on a foot-worn path filled with wet leaves and spent pine needles.

Out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of motion behind me. Twigs cracked. A rhythmic panting grew louder.

Faster. Run faster.

I dared a quick glance behind. Flashes of silver fur, oval sea-blue eyes, and ivory claws pounding the path, gaining on me as I broke out of the tree line, sprinting to the cliffs.

Go go, go! Now!

I floated my arms out from my sides and caught the heavy air in a quick jerk. Lifting effortlessly on air wings, my body launched out over the silver speckled granite cliff. The galloping tiger came to an abrupt halt just short of the cliff rim, disoriented. Pebbles and dirt fell from the turf edge, tumbling down the steep bank in slow motion. The sleek animal stood motionless at the edge and shook its head in confusion.

Lights in the valley twinkled like ten thousand chandeliers as I slid through the air on a wind fold. My small frame in a soft caress, my

long hair swirled outwards. Air rushing now, faster and faster. Was I falling or flying?

Sudden panic stabbed at me as I looked down into the twilight.

I'm falling!

I was much too far away from the small homes tucked into the valley. Now I was disconnected. Would my powers hold? What if I fell now?

Float, like its water, just float, relax.

I took a deep breath. My heart was still pounding from the sprint through the forest. I cocked my body downward and caught the liquid air again with my hands, accelerating toward the tiny lights below.

I have control. I won't fall. I am an airplane.

Faster I went, the air buffeting my hair and flattening my shirt. Fly up! Up! I swooped upwards and banked to the left. Then to the right.

Flying! I am flying!

Exhilaration displaced my fear and the breath of the planet flowed with mine as I glided down towards the gleaming lights of the valley. I raised my head back and moved my arms out flat against the airstream to slow myself. The ground was coming up fast.

Too fast! Control, control. Concentrate.

As my descent slowed, houses and neighborhoods came into clear relief. Which house? I was lost. No, I would find it. I always did. I floated along, slowing, looking for landmarks. Slow, float, slow . . . fifty feet above the trees, feeling the arms of the breeze, slow. Euphoria surged, my powers holding. I recognized the streets, I knew the way to go.

I floated up deliberately, my arms treading air. Like a helicopter descending slowly to its landing pad, I lowered, concentrating. Energy consumed. My feet touched the wet grass. All of my weight

now on the ground. Suddenly I felt my 60-pound frame sink in to the ground with toes spread. I shivered involuntarily with the cold reaching up from the soles of my feet.

No one saw my early morning descent into the back yard of our modest split-level home. This is the way it always is. I wasn't sure why no one noticed me, but I was glad, because the concentration was enormous; distractions interfered with my powers.

"Lisa!" My mother's call was urgent through the open bedroom door. "It's time to get up for school."

I blinked my eyes open and shut them again.

"Ten minutes."

"No, Lese, come on, please get up."

"Ok, Ok, I'm up. I'm up."

I stretched and thought about going back to sleep. Back to my flight. I loved the sensation of flying through the night air, with complete control. It was so real. When I dreamed I was flying, I really was flying. The exhilaration and the fear competed, and was real. Escape. Go back to sleep. Dream and fly. You are the airplane.

"Lisa!"

"I'm up, Mom, I'm up."

She calls me Lese when she's relaxed, and Lisa when she's tense.

I threw the blanket back on the bed and sat up. I rubbed my eyes and ran my hands through my short blonde hair.

I hate school days.

The energy of my dream began to fade as I thought about school. Everything was completely out of step. Teachers were always upset with me. But today is Friday. Tomorrow is Saturday. Maybe I could live through today, and get to tomorrow. How?

Develop a plan.

Standing up, I navigated a winding path through comic books, Tom Swift and Hardy Boys mysteries, transistor radio parts, Twinkies wrappers, and an assortment of cardboard boxes to the closet. I gathered up some clothes from the closet floor and padded down the hall to the bathroom.

"Don't be afraid to take a big step. You can't cross a chasm in two small jumps." ~ David Lloyd George

2. ROCKET PILOT

I pulled a cereal box off the kitchen shelf. Mom had placed a ceramic bowl and a pint container of milk on the counter. She sat next to me in her pajamas, disheveled. I knew she would go back to bed after I left for school. She lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply.

"That thing smells awful."

"I know. I shouldn't do it. Don't ever do this Lese," Mom shook her head.

"Mom, why can't girls be rocket pilots?" I asked.

"Who said you couldn't be a rocket pilot?" Mom said with a puzzled look.

"Neil."

"Who is Neil?"

"My boyfriend at school. We sit together in reading class and homeroom."

"Your boyfriend? What did Neil tell you?" Mom looked at me with a smile and a what-is-it-now look.

"That girls can't be rocket pilots because they might need to be rescued because they don't know how to work things," I replied.

Mom suppressed a chuckle and then looked at me with a suddenly serious face. "Lisa, you can be anything you want to be. If you want to be a rocket pilot, then you can be a rocket pilot. Don't listen to anyone who tells you anything else. If you think you can't be something then you won't even try. Both boys and girls, and

grownups, have to be rescued from time to time; it doesn't have anything to do with whether you are a boy or girl."

Mom got off the bar stool unsteadily and moved over to me for a hug. She was so smart and she knew exactly what I was thinking all of the time, which made it difficult to get away with anything. I craved the attention that she gave me.

"Ok, so I want to invent a rocket ship like Tom Swift's rocket and take off from the back yard. Or, even better, make a backpack for flying through the air." I wouldn't mention to Mom right now that actually I could FLY through the air all by MYSELF. But I would tell her, soon. We were best friends, I had to tell Mom everything, no matter what it was. Even when I was bad, she listened to me carefully before the admonishment came.

"Lese you can do all those things but there's one thing you will need to do first."

"What do I need to do first?" I was so happy she was taking me seriously.

"School. You need to pay attention in school. You need to learn about physics and math, and the other details that making a rocket ship require. I know you love to read, but there's more to navigating life than just being able to read."

I knew my mother was right, but I didn't want to think about it. She was being gentle with me. I needed discipline but Mom didn't have the heart to deliver it. She spoiled me.

She went on, now more sternly, "Yesterday the school administrator called me to say that you'd missed three days of school again with no written excuse. It caught me off guard, I didn't know where you were."

I exhaled. I didn't want to go to school. I hated the little skirt I had on with the tartan design and the white plastic belt. It was impossible to climb a tree in it. Usually I wore shorts underneath my dresses so I could get out of them quickly when school was out. Mom didn't know that I was skipping school. I would tell the

teacher an excuse, I would make it up, and she would write it down in a notebook. I thought they would let it go.

What was I thinking?

Mom knew now. I was trapped. My face flushed and my stomach knotted up. I was going to have to tell her everything. But not now.

“Oh, Lese, your dad called. He wants to see you next weekend.”

The knots in my stomach turned to brick and my face got hotter. I held my breath as my mother looked at me.

No, no.

“The last time I was with Dad his girlfriend was mean to me. She doesn’t like me. She said you didn’t dress me right. And then her dog tried to bite me. She said I was a . . . waif. What’s a waif?”

Mom shook her head and looked at me. “You didn’t tell me the dog tried to bite you.”

“It wasn’t as bad as Alexandra saying you that you don’t take care of me. Please Mom, I don’t want to go.”

“Ok. I’ll tell your dad you don’t want to go now. Maybe later.”

I exhaled.

“Ok, Rocket Pilot in Training, finish up your cereal and brush your teeth. You need to get going.”

Change the subject.

“Mom, have you seen Eric?”

“No, I haven’t, did he escape again?”

“Yup, he did. I think he got out of his cage the day before yesterday, because I went to feed him last night and he wasn’t in there.”

“Didn’t you end up finding him on that Rhododendron plant by the front window in the living room last time? I think he likes that plant.” Mom came over to me. “We’ll find Eric. Come on, get ready

for school.”

“Let me look for Eric.”

“No, Lese, not now. When you get home. Please.”

“Ok, ok.” I picked up my bookbag and went out the back door.

Eric was a chameleon. He was a gift from my brother Jeff. Why Jeff chose to do something so nice for his little sister was inexplicable. I made a terrarium for Eric with bugs, worms, twigs, and moss. But every few months he escaped. We always found him on a plant. Eric was a lime green American Chameleon, also known as a red throated Anole. His end to end size was all of five inches, so he blended in perfectly with the plants.

The nicest thing about not planning is that failure comes as complete surprise rather than being preceded by a period of worry and depression.

~ Sir John Harvey-Jones

3. THE FORT

Sunlight sifted through the trees in dancing patches on the footpath to the aqueduct. An autumn chill hung in the air, dew drops sparkling on the tips of leaves and silver orbs hanging from the boughs of pine trees. The same rich pine aroma of my flying dream forest enveloped me and I drank it in gulps as I started running on the path. A stillness hung in the morning air like a spell. I heard my sneakered feet crunch the pine needles and remaining crisp fall leaves. I reached the aqueduct and made a right turn, towards Happy Hollow Elementary School.

The aqueduct, as everyone called it, was the water supply for the town. It was a wide grass path that could fit a truck. I rarely saw anyone walking it, and never in the morning when I went to school. I could have taken the school bus, but the bus trip was 20 minutes long with all its stops. The aqueduct was a straight shot, private, and fun.

The eight-minute walk brought me to the edge of the school yard. I stopped and looked through the trees at the red brick school building. Children were lingering around the picnic tables and playground, waiting for the bell to begin the day.

The last two days I had stopped exactly like this and decided not to go into the schoolyard, but to go back home and play. If I entered school now, would they send me to the principal's office? What excuse would I use for the last two days? What had Mom told them on the phone?

I'll be in trouble. I'll have to go to the principal's office again. I'll have to stay after school again. I will have to write a message over and over

again. The other children will laugh at me again.

I shifted my weight from one foot to the other and closed my eyes. I took a deep breath and looked at the school yard.

I can't.

I turned around and walked the half mile back home. The farther away I got from Happy Hollow School the better I felt.

I returned through the backyard, the sunlight brighter and the air warmer. I quietly inched open the side door to the garage. I listened for activity. Nothing. My mother had gone back to bed. This is how it always was. She would stay up all night and then sleep until 3 pm.

Sometimes the family friend, Chuck, would come over late at night and drink with Mom. They would laugh and then they would fight. Last week I had awoken with a start hearing them shouting. Then a glass broke. Fear infused my small frame and my breathing became quick and short.

Get out. Get out of the house.

I tiptoed down the hall from my bedroom, shaking and shrinking against the wall, hoping they would not notice me. I slipped past the kitchen door where mom and Chuck were screaming at each other. Down the stairs, into the garage, I slipped out the side door.

I breathed a sigh of relief. *Get away. Run.*

I put the sneakers and jeans on that I had grabbed and ran down the street to the model homes under construction. I entered the second home, which was farther along than the others, and went upstairs to the bathroom. The home was still only framed, not yet ready for drywall, but the house wrap was on the outside. I climbed inside the tub and took another deep breath. The pounding of my heart was slowing. *It's ok, it's ok.*

I fell asleep.

An icy breeze woke me up. I looked around. Where was I? A

spike of fear. Then I realized that I'd run from the house. I had no idea what time it was. I shivered. *I better get home!* I sat up straight in the tub. Moonlight was shining through the open window frame. I saw my dog, Smiley, get up from her sentinel position next to the tub.

"Smiley! How did you get here?" She cocked her head. "You followed me! Good girl!" She wagged her tail vigorously. A Collie-Shepard mix, she was a loyal companion. She was named after her habit of baring her teeth into a smile when she got excited.

I crawled out of the bathtub and made my way down the steps to the first floor and exited the open side door. It was eerily quiet and no lights were showing in any of the neighbors' homes. Chuck's car was gone. I went in the garage side door with Smiley and took my sneakers off, padding quietly back upstairs to my room. The kitchen was a mess. Passing mom's room, I saw that she was asleep. I entered my room and lay down on my bed, quickly falling asleep.

I hope he never comes back.

I snapped back to my walk now through the woods. I could feel the sun warming my shoulders as I made the turn to the narrow path back to the house.

I entered the basement and snuck down the hallway. Across from my brother's room was a clothes closet packed with coats and shirts. I slid past the clothing to a small square door in the wall under the landing of our compact split-level home. I got on my hands and knees and moved the two latch bolts outward and moved the door aside. After crawling inside, I placed the door back into position. I had mounted two latches on the inside, so it was a secure space and no one could break in.

My fort consisted of a six foot by five-foot space, with another three feet extending back under the stairs. Piled in layers on the concrete floor were four blankets and two pillows which I propped up on one side to provide sitting comfort while reading.

Stacked along one wall in between the two by fours were sets of Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew, and Tom Swift hardback books, and three stacks of Superman comic books. A single 40-watt light bulb in a fixture hung bare from the four-foot-high ceiling.

In another corner were my catalogs and kit components - Popular Mechanics, the Allied catalog, Edmund Scientific, and Boy's Life. I would ask Mom for money so that I could send away for airplane model kits and electronics kits. She would give me ten cents and I would painstakingly print my name and address on the order form and tape the dime above it, fill out the front of an envelope, and wait patiently for the model brochure to arrive ten weeks later.

The comic books were creased and worn. I reached over to the stack and pulled out the one on the bottom. I propped up the pillows and leaned back, reading. I felt the cold coming through the blanket layers from the concrete floor. I needed to get another blanket or maybe some towels from the upstairs closet. Not now. I lay on my side, trying to get more comfortable.

I began reading, losing track of time.