

Memories of Bob

by Ginger Andrews

When I first met the Chassell Family, it was through Bob's sister Karen, and he was absent from Stockbridge—though what doing or where I don't think I knew. My first inklings of him came from his bookcase, which contained parts of his very wonderful collection of science fiction, because I was, I believe, sleeping in what had been his room. It was the summer of 1971, as I recall, and I was at loose ends, having been having emotional difficulties with my own family, who lived at the opposite end of the state. So I read quite a number of his boyhood books. Through Karen, the family simply absorbed me for the summer, and also provided a refuge on weekends when I returned to school in Great Barrington in the fall.

I got to know Bob a little more when he took up flying and would occasionally bring friends out to Nantucket to enjoy a day at the beach. I would pick them up at the airport; in those days general aviation was a grass parking area to which one could drive directly, where there were mostly other Cessnas and other modest aircraft. I'd drive right up to the plane, collect Bob, Lois, Helen or other friends, deliver them to a beach and sometimes have dinner with them afterwards before they headed back to Stockbridge.

After Bob's father died I went to Alaska with Margot, his mother. The original plan was that he would buy a plane suitable for The Bush and that Bob would fly the three of us up there, sell the plane in Alaska, and return on a commercial flight. The goal of the trip was to visit friends who had also lived for a time at the Rattlesnake Mountain Road house and were now fur trappers (among other occupations) on a river 150 miles west of Fairbanks. So accordingly we went plane-shopping. This involved flying around to various tiny airports in the Northeast to look at tail-draggers Bob had seen advertised for sale. Eventually Bob found a plane that appeared to meet all his criteria and he quizzed the seller on the plane's history; it had had a number of repairs over the years. There was a slight crease, barely perceptible in the metal on the underside of one wing. Bob ran his finger over it and asked about it, and was told it had been caused by the prop of another aircraft, when parking. Ultimately he rejected this plane also; although it met all his specifications otherwise, he said, "This is a plane to which things happen." I think this illustrates his sharp sense of intuition and willingness to use it, as well as the practicality of his sense of adventure. For example he was the "test pilot" for the ultralight club and had to make several emergency landings on a nearby golf course; he became expert at landing without messing up the golfers' shots. He was always a careful pilot, never taking off without updated weather information, a properly filed flight plan, and an instrumentation and fuel check. The careful routine was part of the fun of flying for him I think. I think of him, always viewing the fuel and dashing the sample down before we took off. And he always opened his side window and yelled "Clear!" before starting his engine.

He liked to fly low, around 500 feet, where he could see the ground and other features, so the slowness of the aircraft never bothered him. One fascinating trip was at Thanksgiving when I joined Margot and Bob on a trip out to spend the holiday with Karen, Fred and the children when

they lived in Kansas. Hunters (and the deer successfully avoiding them) in West Virginia, Creeks in Kentucky, the brown layer of air pollution from coal-burning power plants in Ohio, the Wabash River in flood, all spooled by below us. On another occasion we were on the way to New York city to stay with Bob's sister Anstiss. We flew down the Hudson, observing the Palisades, and circled the Statue of Liberty before landing at Teterborough. I remember looking *UP* at the top of the World Trade Center, fascinated to see it from below after having previously been to the observation platform and looked *DOWN* on small planes. I still treasure this memory of pre- 9 /11 days. He was always ultra-responsible for people in his care, and was a wonderful son to his mother Margot in her last years.

He was also very aware of his own state and capabilities, as for example the summer when he said he would stop driving when the snow began to fly. He went into Fairview Commons nursing home because "it was the sensible thing to do." A few days or perhaps a couple of weeks before he died, I dreamt about Bob; in my dream he was at an airport starting his pre-flight routine, and as I woke I heard him in my mind, yelling "Clear!" So that's how I like to think of him-- taking off on another adventure.