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Memories of MAINE



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From Chicken
Farm to Art School
- Maine's Artistic
Treasure

1946 STINSAN VOYAGER

LEWISTON - AUBURN SCHOONERS

MAINE TOURMALINE NECKLACE

Road to Cummings Studio, photo
courtesy Skowhegan School of
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DEDICATED TO THE HISTORY OF MAINE AND TO THE PEOPLE AND PLACES THAT PRESERVE IT

BACK TO THE FUTURE: RESURRECTED PLANE HAS ROLE IN LIFE-SAVING INNOVATION

By Ann Carrie Fisher

For some people, flying without fear would be a dream come true. That dream is becoming a reality, and a Maine doctor has a front row seat.

When Louis Hanson falls for something, he falls hard. In 1961, when he was 9 years old, Hanson became “just transfixed” by a red and white plane that flew over his boyhood home in Kansas.

“I thought, ‘Boy, I want to do that someday’; it never left me,” he said.

Fast forward 40 years. The place is Maine. The object Hanson becomes transfixed by is - no surprise - a plane. But it isn't just any plane. Hanson's dream of flight has grown to include a plane that is firmly grounded in history.

Hanson, a family physician from Durham, is the owner of a 1946 Stinson Voyager that was key in the development of ground-breaking, life saving technology that is deployed in the event of a plane crash. For the first time, that technology is being fully developed in hopes of mass production, potentially saving thousands.

In the early 1960s - around the same time the young Louis Hanson became transfixed by a red and white airplane - a man named Dario Manfredi outfitted the plane Hanson now owns to test a parachute system that would safely land a plane in the event of an emergency. Hanson and his historic Stinson Voyager are now being featured in a documentary film about Aviation Safety Resources (ASR), a Long Island-based company founded by Dario Manfredi, the son of the Stinson's original owner. The mini-documentary will highlight ASR's technology and is the foundation for a larger feature being planned.

To develop and test the system, Manfredi and his partner Angelo Raiti bought the plane that would one day belong to Dr. Hanson, a Stinson Model 108 Voyager 9 (Serial Number 13, Registration N39443). The men, with the help of a parachute company and engineers, equipped the plane with special wing attachment pins, three parachutes and explosive devices that the pilot could activate to separate the fuel-bearing wings from the fuselage.

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Each piece would be brought to earth under its own parachute.

“I remember his saying he was reading stories about people losing their lives in crashes and wondering, why does it have to happen,” said the younger Manfredi about his late father. “That’s what got him involved. He had very good vision.”

The system was tested in an FAA-sanctioned test flight on Nov. 9, 1967 at Lakehurst Naval Air Station in New Jersey. The system worked as planned; the wings were intentionally blown off the fuselage at 5,000 feet and the fuselage floated to the earth with little damage.

Shortly after the test flight, the senior Manfredi was forced to sell the Stinson, which he had affectionately dubbed Isabella. She was placed in storage, but later purchased and retrofitted. Manfredi was retrofitting a second Stinson for more tests in 1984 when a stroke ended his life.

Aviation Safety Resources now has two patents with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office - one for the TriChute Safe Landing System and another for a Smart Recovery System that complements the parachute system.

Hanson began his ascent into the world of flight after his wife gave him lessons at Twitchell's airfield in Turner for Christmas in 2001. “I had no excuse not to take flying lessons. I flew as often as I could.”

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When Dr. Hanson saw Isabella in 2002, it was like love at first sight. Hanson said he was leaving the airfield after a flying lesson on Memorial Day when he saw movement out of the corner of his eye. A man was placing a for sale sign in the front window of the airplane. "I thought, I'd better get out of this quick," Hanson said with a laugh. "But it was too late."

With her sunflower yellow wings and a fuselage the color of chocolate, Isabella would be hard to miss. Hanson went home and told his wife about the plane and the couple drove back to the airfield. "I looked at it, opened the door and smelled it. That was it," said Hanson.

The doctor is quick to credit his wife Julie for encouraging him to take lessons and buy Isabella, The daughter of a Navy carrier pilot, Julie insists Hanson wear the sweetheart wings her dad gave her mom whenever he flies. "She's the catalyst and I'm eternally grateful. She has a perspective and balance about flight a lot of people don't have," said Hanson.

The good doctor was in the right place at the right time. Isabella had been bought and flown to Maine over the weekend by a man whose business is buying and selling planes. By Monday it was Hanson's.

"That's just one of the wrinkles of time and space that occurred in a fortunate sequence that allowed us to have the airplane," said Hanson, who became the proud owner of a plane before

he had his pilot's license, or had even flown solo. "I was kinda in shock and awe."

Hanson said Isabella caught his eye because "simplicity appeals to me just on its face."

Isabella is not only classy, she's a classic. Called a "tail dragger," Hanson said Stinson Voyagers are "like original airplanes were built." The wings and fuselage are covered by fabric, as opposed to aluminum, which became standard after the 1960s.

"The enjoyment in a plane of this sort is not about speed, but about reflective, leisurely pleasure," said Hanson.

It was Hanson's flight instructor, Tom O'Connell, who researched the Stinson on the Internet and found the Web site and history that included Manfredi's invention. One of the last lessons O'Connell gave Hanson was to look up the Web site and see what he found out. "I was just stunned," Hanson said. After learning about the plane's history, Hanson contacted Manfredi and his sister, Savia Giarrappa. Seeing his dad's old plane "brought back a lot of memories - wonderful memories - about me being young and seeing him work on the plane," said Manfredi. "I'm tickled pink to actually see it again and that the plane is still flying."

Hanson became firmly linked to Isabella's colorful history, and even had a part in the documentary, which is due out this summer. He also became friends with Manfredi and Giarrappa, spending the day with them, taking them up in the plane and having dinner with the siblings.

Hanson is also clearly taken with Isabella, as she is still called. His affection for Maine, his adopted home, is also clear. Describing himself as a "corn-fed mid-western farm boy," Hanson was born and raised in north central Kansas, four hours west of Kansas City. His family, including three sisters, raised beef cattle and hogs and grew wheat, corn and soybeans, along



Savia Manfredi Giarrappa and Dario Manfredi, daughter & son of inventor of TriChute landing system and original owner of Dr. Hanson's plane.



Dr. Louis Hanson and the historic Stinson.



Dr. Hanson's plane at hanger at Twitchell's Airport in Turner, Maine.

with other crops and animals. "I went to the same one-room school my parents went to," said Hanson, adding that the school had electricity, but no

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