

**April 22-26, 2009 - Lakeland Florida
EAA's Sun n' Fun Aviation Expo**

My finance, Miriam, lived and grew up in Africa. Her parents were missionaries in Nigeria and she did not return to the States until well into her teenage years. Her favorite movie is "Out of Africa" with Robert Redford and Meryl Streep, and she has seen it hundreds of times...mostly at bedtime. And, although she is usually asleep by the time that the train gets to Mombasa, Kenya (almost the opening scene), she is able to recite every line in the movie.

"Why do you keep looking at this film over and over, when you already know how it turns out", I have asked her. "For the same reason that you keep going to air shows, where you see the same planes and stunts, performed over and over" she responds. She is, of course, right. And yet, unless you are yourself a pilot, you will never understand the thrill of seeing these machines being put through their paces by expert aerobatic flyers. Someone recently told me, "flying an airplane is something that you just cannot explain to a non pilot". I know exactly what she meant. You cannot convey the thrill of the take-off, the climb up to altitude, the feeling of making a tight turn and not losing or gaining height during that turn. You cannot express the satisfaction gained in maintaining an exact course line, or finding your way solely by pilotage and then making a perfect landing at your destination. You cannot explain the innate, but subtle messages that you receive from the winds aloft, the smell of the air surrounding you, or the sound of a well tuned engine. Or, for that matter, the feeling of exhilaration and freedom that you get from effortlessly gliding over farmland, mountains, woods or swamps...sometimes all during the same flight. This is something special that only airmen (and air women) can understand. That is why pilots keep on going to air shows and aviation expos!!

Last week I attended one of the premier aviation shows held in the US each year. It is known throughout the world as the EAA's "Sun n' Fun" expo, and is held in Lakeland, Florida each Spring. "It's like a Spring Break for Pilots", says its entrance banner. I managed to be there for the duration of the event...all six days of it. I cheated a bit, though in that I arrived by motor home instead of by airplane. Since I am currently out on job assignments and use the bus as my mobile office, it made more sense to leave the Highlander behind on this adventure. However, the Just Aircraft company was well represented by 5 of their builders and their respective airplanes.



Hot air balloon lift off as seen thru bi-plane wings



Warbirds, nose to nose to nose



WW II carrier based aircraft with folded wings



Current Navy trainer aircraft on flight line

The morning of the baloon assention was spectacular with a total of 27 hot air baloons lifting off precisely at 7 AM into clear colbalt blue skies just as the sun began to rise over the eastern horizon. It was simply breathtaking...as was the airshow later that afternoon. In addition of the myraid of WW II warbirds, we watched in awe as a F-18A Super Hornet went through its paces. Speeds ranged from a slow fly by at 100 MPH (this is the photo I used) to an ear shattering 500+ MPH speed run with afterburners ablaze. Aerobatics were conducted in prop planes, jets and even helicopters. There was a spellbinding night aerobatics display with the participants leaving behind trails of sparkling cascades, explosive firework volleys and glowing smoke, all in a background of complete darkness. There were 4 hangers full of vendors displaying the latest in aircraft hardware and avionics. There were booths hawking everything from \$5.00 sunglasses to fly-in community lots starting at \$50,000. Airplanes on display ranged from \$15,000 powered parachutes to multi-million dollar corporate jets. And, while not everyone was buying, all were looking...some harder than others.

And during all of this, the weather was great. Sunny clear skies every day with temperatures reaching into the low 80's. There was a constant 15-20 mph wind, which made the warmth completely tolerable. Evenings produced cool 60 degree temperatures which allowed me to turn off the A/C and rely on a gentle breeze coming through my bedroom windows, as created by my kitchen exhaust fan. However, now that the show is over, I have to get back to work...at least until the turnover of my remaining business clients on June 1st. Then I will be able to participate in my very own aircraft expo as I begin my summertime adventure West...this time with my airplane in tow behind the motor home. I will keep all posted of my travels on this photo blog, just as I did last summer.



WW II Warbirds in a flight of six T-28's & AT6's



Lockheed's Korean War era T-33 "T-bird" trainer



F-18A Super Hornet in 100 MPH slow flight mode



The Just Aircraft booth always seemed to have interest



The Aeroshell aerobatic team performed daily