

## Cheryl Johnson Adventurer Extraordinaire

Looking back fifty years since graduation from Tulsa Central...there is so much in so many categories to relate. Life was an adventure! Yes, there were highs and lows as in all our lives e.g. marriages and relationships that ended and the loss of prematurely born twin boys (1975).



I am retired now; living peacefully with a beautiful lake view on the Elk River arm of Grand Lake near Grove, OK. Care of my critters (a sheep, two goats, a 26 year old burro, two pigs, many cats and formerly homeless dogs) takes up most of my time...oh yes, I also feed many wild raccoons! Own three boats including a small sailboat. Mother lived with me for about seven years before passing away at 92 (2002). This photo with her dog, Mitzi, 1997.



So...where to begin...freshman year of college was at Baylor University where I learned to fly. Then transferred to Oklahoma State University as an engineering major--received my Private Pilot's license in 1959 and my B.S. in Industrial Engineering and Management in 1963. (Have an MBA, 1990-University of Phoenix)

At the 1962 Intercollegiate competition I won the "Top Woman Pilot Award." And so, with 90 hours, I thought I could fly anything! That summer, after being in England for a week on an engineering student work program, I rented a Tiger Moth (open cockpit biplane) to tour the Midlands! I flew for about three hours, got lost, landed in a housing development to ask directions...took off, barely clearing the trees, then ran out of gas and landed in a farmer's field....drinks were "on the house" at the local pub that evening when the aviation crew from Coventry brought gas and a pilot who could get us back home the next day. My English hosts were surprised to find reporters from AP and UPI there to interview me in my OSU sweatshirt! My Father in Tulsa was even asked by a local radio station what he thought of me flying a plane and riding a motorcycle in Europe--to which he replied that I was "very adventurous and they did not know what to expect."



Later that summer I did take the motorcycle to the continent--all the way to Madrid...what fun riding in circles around the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.



In 1967, I joined the crew of a 50ft ketch--named "Nirvana" (couple who owned the boat were Hungarian and French)...we sailed from Hawaii. I did the navigation plotting---we were *lucky* to find Fanning Island (near the equator) where four of the crew left the boat. The couple, an 18 year old boy and I stayed to take the boat on to Western Samoa...after a few weeks I returned to the US from Pago Pago (American Samoa).



In 1960-61, while living in Denver, I bought an MG-TD to race with SCCA. In 1963 I bought a Lotus Elite which I raced in northern California SCCA (1964/65). I owned the Lotus Elite for twenty-one years...sold it to an OSU graduate! When my ex (an Air Force Colonel) and I lived in Germany, I took the car for repairs at the factory in England where I met Colin Chapman (the Father of the Lotus cars) who autographed my "Lotus" book. I had visited the factory in 1962 so was fun to actually return as an owner of one of their famous cars.



I began mountain climbing, hiking and skiing while living in Colorado and California. In Europe completed a climbing course at Rosenlauri in Switzerland. Because I was the smallest, I was the one lowered into the crevasse to teach crevasse rescue! I lost a carabiner on one of the climbs and later returned solo to retrieve it...



It was special with my initials and from the "Ski Hut" in Berkeley, CA!

Our tour in Germany was exciting--golfing, skiing...(here in Zermat with Matterhorn in background)--enjoying life in a small German town south of Munich! I was President of the Officer's Wives' Club and organized a Red Cross volunteer chapter at our base hospital. Earned my Sailplane rating at a German school.



Mother visited for several weeks of touring Europe and England in the Lotus...it broke down so we toured Italy and Greece in a VW!

Before leaving Europe (1971), we flew to Spain then New Delhi where we toured the Taj Mahal at midnight with a full moon! Very romantic! Except for the wild and crazy car ride from New Delhi! Then on to Bangkok, Thailand for an interesting visit after which I flew via East African Airways from Bangkok to Bombay, India then on to Nairobi, Kenya for three adventurous weeks during which I contracted malaria...was treated in the dispensary at Karachi, Pakistan.

My sister, Linda, was in the Peace Corps in Tanzania in the late 60's. While in Africa she painted a large mural on the restaurant wall of the Kibo Hotel, half way up Mt. Kilimanjaro! I wanted to photograph it. Her directions were to take the train from Nairobi to Moshi in Tanzania--walk across the street to the Bamboo bar--order a beer and...wait...sure enough, a man approached me and agreed to take me to the hotel. Yes! The German lady still owned the hotel, remembered my sister and...the mural was on the wall! Now, to find another ride!

I noticed three young women at a table, they were from Australia. I joined them and in their rickety car went to just about all the game parks.. Even met Jane Goodall at the Ndutu tent camp in the Serengeti. Visited Lake Manyara and the Ngorongoro Crater (Hatari was filmed here)--have a photo of a Masai throwing a spear at me because I was taking their picture (now, they pose for photos!) Quite a thrill to see the large herds of animals...even some Cheetahs. From the Serengeti, I hitched a ride on a construction company Cessna back to Nairobi so I could be back in time for my flight to Karachi. What a great trip and adventure.

Our next assignment in the US was in Dayton, Ohio...Wright-Patterson AFB. That's where I met Sugar. I took riding lessons at the Base stables; one evening a Mother and the little girls in the class told me about her. She was to go to the rendering plant the next day because she was pregnant; they could not use a mare and foal at the stables. I called the manager and after negotiations bought the horse! My ex, a golfer and piano player, could not imagine what we would do with a horse...he needed a "gimlet" (mixed drink) so, I named the new foal Gimlet!



The horses became part of our growing animal family; we took them with us when transferred to Colorado. At last, *Life* would become more "normal." And, it did...He did leave me for another (1980) but, overall...I lived there for twenty-two years before being layed off in 1992 from Martin Marietta--now Lockheed-Martin. My career at Martin spanned fifteen years--as a Senior Buyer, Planner and the last several as a Staff Auditor.



Since I had boats, I decided to move to a lakefront property and, since Mother was in Tulsa, Grand lake seemed the ideal location. We both fell in love with this three acres of pasture, mini-forest and open lake view the minute we saw it.

I brought my 21 year old horse (his Mother was Sugar), burro, a small pig, two parrots, eleven cats and eleven dogs...made eighteen trips to complete the move in March, 1995. Every day I am happy with the calm living, country setting and lake view. Yes! I just think I am very fortunate to be here!

Cheryl Johnson..16 Sep 2006