

Betty MacGuire

Taking Delight in a Life of Love & Fun & Flying

Betty Lee was in love. So in 1943 when the starry-eyed 19-year-old packed a bag and snuck out of the house to elope with, of all things, the *Yankee* of whom her Texas ranching family did not approve, her course was set. Her heart's aim was true. And here she is today, some 60 years later, as dazzled as the day her "cute but featherhead" girlfriend at the University of Texas, Austin, introduced her to the dashing John MacGuire, the man with whom she would soar through 58 years of love and fun and flying.

But it is not only her fairytale romance with the late New York-born MacGuire, who made his name in ranching, road contracting, as well as in oil and gas, that puts the sparkle in this devoted wife's eyes, the charm in her voice, the song in her life. There is also the priceless legacy he left her.

"You can do it!" is what John always said," recalls the lilt-voiced MacGuire, who at 80 is as plugged into delight as the day the pretty El Paso rancher's daughter had the spunk enough to elope. "He wanted me to do *everything*. And I was having so much fun I just figured, well," she laughs, "if something is going to kill us, it will kill us.

Once you get over the fear of dying, that takes care of everything."

Happily, the "everything" MacGuire did has more to do with living – *really* living. And the motif continues. Just catch her left seat in her Bonanza or right-seat-and-finessing in her Citation. Yes, this multi-licensed, instrument-rated she-ace of the air has been flying since a bride back in Milwaukee. It was there, just after the war, her engineer groom (mechanical, aeronau-

tical) took a job with Allis-Chalmers, the farm equipment manufacturers, and with "not much else to do" the two crazy kids hopped into separate Piper Cubs, soloed on the same day and sealed their love with the kiss of a common passion.

"At first when I'd taxi out by myself I'd



and Carol Johnson, an El Paso yoga-business owner), the flying MacGuires found Mom at the throttle as often as not. From the tiny 36 hp Aeronca-K that was the couple's first plane ("John said the \$3.50 rental fees were costing us too much!" she laughs) to the Beechcraft Queen Air that was "like a truck," and all the Cessnas in between (310, 342, etc.), MacGuire always checked-out with flying colors; she only sometimes surprised herself.

"As a child I always dreamed of being a pilot one day, but never with a burning desire. I just thought it would be fun," says the aviator who along the way nonetheless found herself fantasizing about such things as twin-engines, a pressurized cabin. "Oh! to get up over the weather – oh my!" she laughs, clearly loving how these days she *can* outwit weather however she pleases, as an instrument pilot.

"I figured out early on that John had ideas, and if he ran the marriage we'd have fun. If I did, I knew, we'd stay home," says the woman who is "a pilot in my own right, but..." But? "I wanted (the flying) to be his thing. I wanted him to have the feeling he was the important one." MacGuire says she knows some women take exception to

this, however, she says, that was how she knew "to be happy." MacGuire ran with fun. "Oh, our guardian angel was getting gray hair over us!" she recalls of the couple's early airborne adventures.

But all was not madcap flights into the wild blue yonder of young love. In 1947 the MacGuires returned to El Paso to take up ranching along the lines of Betty's family (Hereford, cotton, alfalfa) and the man with "ideas" eventually created with his



helpmate ("I was right there") a farming-ranching enterprise that reached from Hudspeth County, Texas to Blythe, California, to Tucson, Arizona, to Chihuahua, Mexico. All the more places for MacGuire to fly. Then there were the many trips to California to visit family. And the hobbies – oh, the hobbies! – that kept this ever-game Texan with the quiet, self-effacing manner and elegant, cultured tones of a "lady," first and foremost, pushing her personal envelope. But as her biggest booster always bragged, she could do it: Ham radio. Golf. Trap shooting. Yacht racing. Powerboating.

"I'd just be beginning to get better at something and John would suddenly decide, Let's do something else!" says MacGuire, who has acquired expertise in all manner of sport, except one: fishing. "John thought it was too slow," she says. A

casual bridge player, MacGuire also involves herself in another of her and her late husband's loves: the War Eagles Air Museum at the Doña Ana County Airport in Santa Teresa, NM (5T6). A fore-to-aft celebration of WWII- and Korean-era aircraft that John MacGuire founded in 1989 with a number of gloriously restored acquisitions, this wonderful collection of planes (from BT-13 Valiant to A7E Corsair II) and automobiles (from a 1935 Auburn Boattail to a 1930 Model A Roadster) is for MacGuire a source of satisfaction about as thrilling as the day she earned her instrument rating.

"I was really proud of myself," she says, gracefully. After all, this savvy flyer is so typically loathe to boast. "That test was *awful*." Then again, as John always said, she could do it. She, for sure, can do anything. ✕

MacGuire with one of the painstakingly restored residents of her beloved War Eagles Air Museum in Santa Teresa, NM