



A Deaf Flight Instructor Wants to Tell Everyone “You Can Fly!”

Greg Lawrence was born prematurely and had an expected batch of health issues as a consequence. Doctors gave him streptomycin, as was the custom of the time. The drug cured his illness, but severely damaged his auditory nerve. The result? Lawrence was healthy overall, but deaf. His grandmother, who today would be considered a speech therapist, sat the young man down in her kitchen and painstakingly worked on Lawrence’s aural abilities five days a week while his parents were at work.

“I spoke so well that nobody knew I was deaf until the eighth grade,” Lawrence smiles.

When he was 16, Lawrence went to an Aviation Medical Examiner to get a student pilot’s license. When he got to the section that asked if he had any existing medical conditions that could affect his flying, Lawrence confessed his hearing deficiencies. The doctor advised him to just keep quiet about his lack of hearing. “Don’t make trouble for yourself.” Lawrence got his student permit and immediately took an introductory flying lesson in a Piper Colt.

Typical of many young student pilots, the interim between flights often was lengthy. But every time he managed to save another \$7, Lawrence was off to the airport. Eventually, he got his private pilot’s license in 1966 and then could do something that no other 18-year-old in his high school could do — fly an airplane.

“I got a pilot’s license because nobody told me I couldn’t,” Lawrence states.

Today, Greg Lawrence is scheduled to travel the country this summer, along with his guide dog, Jenny, taking a simple message to the deaf and anyone else who’s willing to listen (pun intended) — a presentation called “You Can Fly.” He argues that the United States has 13,505 airports, of which approximately 700 have control towers. The rest are easily available to the hearing-impaired pilot. “Do the math,” Lawrence says. “Deaf people can fly from the majority of airports in America.”

Lawrence has more than 3,000 hours of flight time in certified aircraft, but wants to focus his efforts in the light-sport category and train sport pilots. “It’s so easy now,” he points out. “That’s why light sport exists!”

Since revealing his intention to teach the deaf to fly, Lawrence has been inundated with requests. Many organizations across the country (numbering more than 40 at press time) have invited him (and Jenny) to come and present “You Can Fly.” A huge number of deaf people have also contacted Lawrence to get on his list of prospective students. “Jenny and I have been answering phone calls right and left,” he says. (Jenny is trained to alert Lawrence when she hears the phone ring.)

When Flying Adventures caught up with Lawrence, there was just one part of this picture that had yet to come together. Lawrence has completed the written portion for his flight instructor rating, but needs an airplane, an LSA, to prepare for and complete his practical test. He’s willing to travel to you to get it done.

Got an LSA you’d like to share to get this program off the ground? If so, contact Greg Lawrence (and Jenny) by emailing him at deafhawk_2000@yahoo.com or by calling 866.784.4389.