

Chapter V

Living Together

November 1, 1923 – May 15, 1294

In the years following The Great War, naval aviation training had slowed down. Only an average of one thirty five pilots were graduating annually from the twelve month flight course. The majority were Annapolis graduates like Curly, although a few reserve officers and enlisted men also graduated.

On his first day at flight school, he found himself in a class of fifty would-be pilots. Not all of them would make it. Curly was determined to be one who did. Most of his classmates out ranked him by one or two ranks, having graduated from Annapolis ahead of him by a few years. There was even a seasoned Commander among them. There was only Curly and one other from the Class of 1921 in the program. He felt privileged that he had been selected so soon.

The first several weeks were spent in the classroom learning important things like the principles of aeronautics and aircraft structure and design. There were training films, lectures, and flight demonstrations. There was time spent sitting in the cockpit of a Curtiss JN-4 Jenny biplane for instrument panel and control familiarization.

The instruments included an altimeter, airspeed indicator, and a simple magnetic compass, which were installed in the cockpit panel. Also included were some dials that monitor engine temperature, oil pressure, and rpms. The fuel gauge was mounted in front of the cockpit windscreen above the fuel tank. There was a single control stick and a pair of foot brakes.

There was even parachute jump training and learning how to fold them. And oh yes, lots physical fitness training. He wanted to fly – not run. But he was willing to pay the price for his wings.

Unlike most every other aspect of military life that doesn't stop for anything, including Christmas, flight school actually took a two week break for the holidays. Before taking the train back to Roanoke he secured a one bedroom apartment in the married officer's complex.

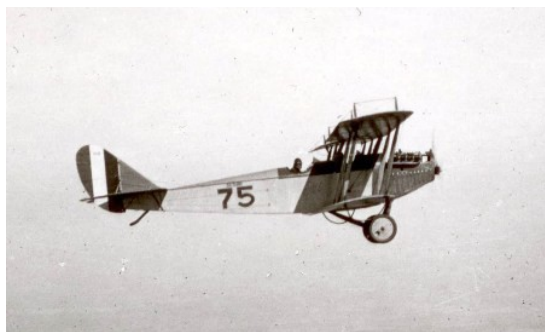
He arrived home a couple of days before Christmas and brought with him a special Christmas present for Geannie. She was thrilled on Christmas morning when she opened it to find a genuine aviator's silk scarf! She declared that she would wear it every time she "flew" the car. The week between Christmas and New Years was spent with family, especially the Austins since Geannie would be moving away for the first time in her twenty five years. On New Years Eve they attended a dance. Of course there was the time it took getting ready for the move.

With everything packed into their car, including Geannie's treasured Electrola, on Friday morning they began the two day, seven hundred and sixty mile trip to Pensacola. For Geannie, it was the farthest she had ever been from home. When she was younger, her family once vacationed at Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. Another time when her father went to Washington D.C. to lobby for a bill that impacted

Roanoke County, he took his family with him and made a vacation out of it. Most recently was the trip to Annapolis for Curly's graduation.

The first day Curly and Geannie went as far as Chattanooga, Tennessee, which was about half way. On Saturday, they went the rest of the way to Pensacola. When they got there, Geannie was fascinated with all of the palm trees and orange groves. On Sunday they got settled into their apartment in time for Curly to resume his training on Monday.

In mid January his training went to the next level as he took his first ride in the front seat of a Curtiss JN-4 Jenny as an observer. The front seat was for the student and the rear seat was for the instructor. A couple of days later he went up again. This time, after take off he took the controls for the first time but relinquished them to the instructor prior to landing. On each flight he was given more and more experience. Each flight built upon the previous. Before long he had mastered take offs and landings.



The Curtiss JN-4 Jenny was derived from the earlier JN-1 from 1915. The name "Jenny" evolved from the JN model designation. Being a biplane, the lower wing is attached to the fuselage, while the upper wing is raised above the fuselage with an arrangement of struts and cables. The landing gear consisted of a pair of wheels attached to supports suspended from the fuselage beneath the lower wing, with a cross axle between the wheels. A skid was mounted below the tail fin and horizontal stabilizers to support the tail when on the ground.

The aircraft was twenty seven feet, four inches long with a wingspan of forty three feet, seven and three quarter inches. The v-eight engine produced ninety horsepower giving it a maximum speed of seventy five miles an hour. However cruising speed was sixty miles an hour, and the landing speed was forty miles an hour. Its rate of climb was relatively sluggish at two hundred feet per minute to a maximum service ceiling of six thousand five hundred feet.

After being married for two years, this was their first experience in actually living together on a permanent basis. They already had a solid, mature relationship but actually living together took it to a whole new level. Curly soon found that Geannie ran a tight ship. However their definitions of shipshape had some differences.

Curly had been living in a controlled living environment during his four years at the Academy and for the last two years aboard the Wadsworth. Living with a beautiful woman sure beat being cooped up with a bunch of foul mouthed, cigarette smoking junior officers and it came with a lot of perks and

advantages. Coming home to home cooking rather having to eat navy chow in the officer's mess was one definite advantage. He quickly learned that there wasn't a mess steward to clean up after him. He found that helping Geannie clear away was a good opportunity to be together.

Sleeping together was another perk, which also revealed some differences. Before, when he came home to see her, they had slept in her bed. When she went to see him, they usually stayed in a hotel. Under those circumstances, the differences weren't so obvious. Now that they were sleeping in *their* bed, the difference became apparent.

He liked it warm and she liked it cool. He liked the bed all tucked in. He even tucked in his pajamas. Geannie, on the other hand, liked to pull back the covers and sleep with only a sheet. Sometimes not even that. Occasionally, on particularly warm nights, she would even remove her nightgown.

To solve the problem, his side of the bed was made up with the sheets and blankets tucked under the mattress, military fashion. On her side of the bed, they hung down, making it easier for her to fold them back.

Living together gave them plenty of time to work toward starting a family. Geannie found that getting pregnant wasn't as easy as she thought it would be. In their two years of marriage there had been plenty of opportunities: another of those perks that Curly referred to. After months and months with no success, Jeannie began keeping a fertility calendar in order to try to get the timing right. She kept telling herself, "One of these times it is bound to work."

Their biggest difference was when it came to money. They had both been raised to be conservative and frugal. They were both that way, but the difference came in how they managed money. Geannie's father had taught her well in regard to personal financial management. He even insisted that in college she take a class on personal money management and beginning classes in economics and accounting.

The Senator ingrained in her the notion that money belongs in the bank. One of his favorite sayings was, "A wise person earns interest, a fool pays it." She had learned to save her money at an early age. She still had money in the bank from her part time job at the telephone company as well as from teaching school. She was horrified to find that Curly had money stashed in a number of places. He even had some uncashed paychecks. He hardly needed to spend any of his money and didn't know what to do with it.

They decided that the best approach to their finances was the common property approach and to let Geannie manage it. She combined her savings with his money and opened a joint account. What he earned was theirs and what she earned, when she was working, was also theirs.

Curly's salary was adequate for their needs. Living in officer's housing helped tremendously since their rent was subsidized. She found that she could make their money go a long ways, with a good portion going into savings.

She applied her well established system of budgeting and record keeping to their household finances. She had the budget all laid out on a series of ledger sheets and knew exactly how much they had for what at any given time. She had a shoe box where she kept all of the receipts. Curly had never bothered to keep them. She had to train him to start keeping them whenever he spent any money.

She faithfully took ten percent of what they earned and set it aside to go in the collection plate each week at church. That was always the first thing she did. The rest of the money was budgeted for the usual things like; rent, gasoline and maintenance for the car, groceries, utilities, clothing, eating out, and entertainment. Furthermore she set side a little money for charity that was spread between the church, the Red Cross, and the Navy-Marine Corps Relief society. Some of it went to other places where she saw fit.

She did give herself and Curly what she called "Mad Money" to be spent for whatever. At first she wanted to account for where it went too. Curly convinced her otherwise. "What's the point of keeping track of 'Mad Money'." He reasoned. "When its gone, its gone." It was hard for her at first, but she found that he was right. Curly spent most of his on the gifts that he loved to lavish on her.

She preferred to keep their money in what her father called a transactional account. It was much easier to keep track of money when writing checks for most things. She had an account at the service station where they bought their gas and had the car serviced and at other places where she shopped. Once a month she would write a check to pay the outstanding balances in full. The only cash on hand was their mad money and some petty cash for incidentals where writing a check was inconvenient or impractical.

She even had their savings budgeted. They had just bought a new car, but one day they would have to replace it, so there was a category for that. There were categories for vacations and a rainy day. She made sure there was money set aside for having a baby. The bulk of it was for long term savings.

Of course, there were always times when something came up. With her system it was easier for her to decide where to pull the money from to cover an unexpected need. Just because Geannie managed their finances didn't mean she had the only say in how it was used. In theory the common property approach also meant that they discussed these things and decided together. In the end, most of the time Curly left it up to Geannie any way.

One of the first things she did with some of the money that Curly hadn't spent was to update his wardrobe of civilian clothes. He hardly had any, besides his suit. His father had ingrained in him the importance of the sabbath as a day of rest. He felt that wearing his uniform to church was like taking your work to church with you. Even with his updated wardrobe, when they went out to places that called for dressing up, she liked him to wear his uniform.

There was one important lesson that Geannie learned form Curly. At first she was annoyed by his

morning routine. He got up at the same time everyday, whether he needed to or not. He had a time for everything. She was more of one to do whatever was needed as the day required. She soon found that if she organized her time, she could get more done and be ready for her day, whatever it brought.

Curly had to report for training at 0800 and was usually able to come home in the evenings by six thirty, with the weekends off. That gave them plenty of time to get used to living together. It was like a normal marriage should be, instead of the their long distance relationship where they were only together at one place or the other on weekends. It most likely wouldn't always be that way, but for now, it was wonderful.

Geannie contacted the local school district and had her name put on the substitute teacher list. In no time she was teaching two or three days a week. She was glad to have something to fill her days. She even found a place where she could practice the piano. She did however develop a new past time. She loved to watch the planes take off and land or practice touch and goes at Station Field. She never knew which one Curly was in, so she started waving at all of them.

One day she observed an airplane flying directly toward her. She thought it odd because it was not on the typical flight path. As it came closer, its wings dipped from side to side and pulled up abruptly as something hit the ground nearby with a thud. She saw a rock with a note attached to it. She ran over and picked it up. The note read simply, "Hi Geannie." Curly was advanced enough in his training that his instructor approved of the stunt.

One weekend in early February, they took a drive down along Florida's Gulf Coast. The weather in Florida in February was much, much nicer than Geannie had ever experienced in Virginia during February. At one point on their drive they turned off the main highway onto an unmarked dirt road. There were no signs or gates telling them they couldn't go there. After going about three quarters of a mile they came to a secluded section of beach. They stopped the car and took a stroll along the beach. They had left their shoes and stockings in the car and walked along the shore with the warm gulf water lapping at their bare feet as the afternoon tide began rolling in.

"The water sure looks inviting," Curly commented. Then lamented, "It's too bad we didn't bring our bathing suits."

"So," Geannie quipped. "Why should that stop us Lieutenant?"

"What are You talking about." She quizzed.

She flashed back, "You know, go in our birthday suits?"

"Huh? I don't know," Curly responded. "What if someone comes along?"

"They won't. Look around there is no one here. You can't even see the main road from here. Come

one it will be fun. You're the one who said you wanted to go swimming.”

“Haven't we had a similar conversation before?” Curly laughed.

“Geannie looked at him with that adventuresome look in her eyes and shouted, “Lets do it!” as she began removing her clothes.

Always the cautious one in these matters, Curly suggested, “Let me bring the car down a little closer so we can undress there. That way they we can run for cover if we need to.”

Once he had moved the car, they stripped down and tossed all of there clothes onto the backseat. Holding hands they ran headlong into the surf. Once they were in up to their waists they dove in. They frolicked in the ocean for more than an hour like a couple of dolphins. Diving under the water and then breaching the surface for air.

As the the afternoon wore on, a game of tag broke out between the two of them. Sometimes the chase took them up onto the beach. Other times through the surf. Finally Curly tackled Geannie on the beach and a wrestling match broke out. After rolling around in the sand for a while, he allowed her to pin him.

“I surrender!” Curly declared, “You win.”

“You're such a pushover, Lieutenant.” as she bent down and kissed him. That led to something else altogether in which Geannie claimed her victory.

Exhausted from their afternoon foray, they laid side by side on the beach watching the sun begin to set low over the Gulf of Mexico. “I think somebody's coming,” Curly announced with a start. “Quick, to the car!” He grabbed her by the hand as he jumped up and dashed for the car. Quickly, they threw on their just their outer clothing and got in the car and headed back up to the main road. They never saw anyone and never knew if someone was actually coming or if Curly was just paranoid, Geannie claims the later.

A few miles down the road they came to a town with a quaint little inn. Curly went in and got a room for the night. While Curly brought their stuff in from the car, Geannie checked out the bathhouse next to the inn. It featured an over sized bathtub and hot water from a warm spring. As Geannie ran some water, she found a complimentary bottle of liquid soap and poured some in the water creating a nice blanket of bubbles.

She went and got Curly and invited him to join her. Taking off what cloths they had on, revealed two very dirty bodies. They both climbed into the soothing warm water and scrubbed the sand off of each other.

Clean and properly dressed, they went to a diner for something to eat. The next morning they slept in quite late. After breakfast at pancake house they began meandering their way back to Pensacola, a little pink from their romp in the sun the day before.

Curly's training was going well. He was eager each day to get over to the field. He loved flying even more than he ever dreamed possible. He found that he had three loves in his life. First and foremost was Geannie. Their love grew deeper and more grounded with each passing week. He loved her much, much more than his other two loves combined. At times he felt a little torn between them. His other two loves were flying and the sea. He longed to go back to sea.

Geannie understood his passion and excitement for his budding career and was content to share him with it. It made him happy which made her happy. She knew that if she tried to force him to choose, they would both be miserable.

During April, Geannie began to feel ill. She just felt out of sorts with her own body. She felt nauseated at times and even downright moody. She tried to keep it from Curly and did a good job of it because he was too into his training to notice and she didn't want to detract him.

Not knowing who else to talk to, she secluded herself in a silence cabinet located in the officer's housing complex and called her mother on a public telephone. She lifted the receiver off the hook. "Operator," a pleasant female voice responded. She smiled remembering all of that times that that pleasant female voice was hers.

"Yes, Operator. Can you please connect me to Roanoke 7-6872?"

"On moment please," the operator said. Then requested, "Please deposit five cents."

Geannie could hear the telephone ringing on the other end followed by the sweet voice of her mother, "Austin residence."

After an exchange of greetings, Geannie broke down in tears as she told her mother how lousy she was feeling. She was shocked to hear her mother laughing at her on the other end of the telephone line.

"Mother," she chided, "Why are you laughin about it."

"I understand perfectly that you don't feel well." she said sympathetically. "I am laughing because I know what is wrong with you and it makes me very, very happy."

"Your happy because I feel lousy?" Geannie sobbed. "That's a mean thing to say!"

"Listen to me baby girl. I'm happy because you're pregnant!"

Gennie started laughing, and screaming in addition to crying all at the same time, "What!?!"

"I know exactly how you are feeling." Mrs. Austin comforted her. "After all, I have been through it five times myself." She continued. "But to be sure, get yourself to a doctor." she advised.

"I don't want to tell Curly until I know for sure. Please don't say anything to anyone either." she requested.

By the time they finished their conversation Geannie had settled down. The first thing she did was to go home and wash her face and put herself back together. After regaining her composure she drove over to the infirmary to make an appointment to see the doctor. She wasn't sure about seeing a Navy doctor but she didn't know where else to go. After all, the infirmary was for the families of the personnel as well. She came away with an appointment for a physical examination later in the week.

On the appointed day she went to her appointment. She didn't know what to expect. The nurse gave her a hospital gown told her to go into the examination room and change out of her clothes and that the doctor would be with her momentarily.

She sat there on a hard examination table for what seemed like a long time. There was a knock on the door and it opened slightly. "Mrs. Brason. May I come in?" the voice softly asked.

"Yes." Geannie responded.

The door opened wide and in stepped through the doctor who closed it behind him. He looked as kind as he sounded. "Mrs. Brason, I am Commander Phillips. Or you can call me Doctor Phillips if you like. I apologize for the way you had to wait. You're probably nervous about seeing a Navy doctor, aren't you Mrs. Brason?"

"It is a little unsettling," Geannie admitted. "But I didn't know where else to go."

"I haven't always been a Navy doctor." he said trying to put her at ease. "Before the war, I had my own practice in a little town outside of Dayton, Ohio. Then in seventeen after we went to war, I wanted to do my part, so I volunteered. After a crash course in officer training, I received my commission. When the war was over I decided to stay in, so here I am today."

He then spent a moment getting to know Geannie and asked how her husband's training was going. He assured her that he knew Lieutenant Brason as he sees each student pilot on a regular basis as part of the training program. He then asked her how she was feeling and the reason for her visit.

Geannie rehearsed her conversation with her mother and concluded, "And that is why I am here."

Doctor Phillips then kindly explained, Now Mrs. Brason, taking care of the human body is what I do. I cant do that very well if I can't see it and touch it. Are you comfortable with that?" He asked.

Geannie just shook he head in the affirmative.

"Okay then," the doctor asked, "Will you come and stand over here in front of me."

Commander Phillips then began his examination. As he proceeded, he had her sit on the table and put his cold stethoscope on her chest. It gave her goose bumps. Then he put it on her back which sent a shiver throughout her entire body.

Next he had he lay down flat on her back and explored her abdomen with his gentle hands. She began to trust him as he proceeded to examine her.

Soon the examination was over. Doctor Phillips informed her, "Well that pretty much takes care of everything. I am going to leave the room now and you can change back into your clothes. I'll be back in just a moment." At that he closed the door behind him.

"What a pleasant bedside manner." she commented to herself. His gentleness and demeanor made the experience not so bad.

After waiting just a few moments, there was another knock on the door and the soothing voice of Commander Phillips asking, "May I come in, Mrs. Brason?"

Again she invited him in.

Sitting in a chair, looking up at Geannie he began, "You are a very healthy twenty five year old woman who just happens to be nine weeks pregnant. Congratulations."

Geannie could hardly contain her emotions.

The doctor continued, "Most people in the medical field consider pregnancy as an illness and treat it like a disease. In my way of looking at things, it is simply a normal function of the human body as God intended it to be.

"The best thing you can do for your baby is to take care of yourself. Eat nourishing food and get adequate sleep. Don't be afraid to get moderate exercise everyday, but nothing too strenuous. I want you to come back to see me again in six weeks. Do you have any questions?" he concluded.

"Yes, sir. Just one." Geannie began stammering to get her question out, "Would it be alright... I mean can ... can my husband and I still... still... you know?"

Sensing her question, Doctor Phillips answered, "I don't see any reason why not. If there is nothing else, I will see you again in six weeks. It was certainly a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Brason."

Geannie left the infirmary on cloud nine. Rather than going back to their apartment she drove into town. She knew exactly what she was looking for, a gift for Curly. After finding the right shop she looked through the merchandise until she found just what she was looking for, a little pink outfit, complete with pink booties, for a baby girl. Somehow she felt strongly that it was a little girl.

When she paid for her purchase she asked, "Could I have it gift wrapped?"

"Certainly." the clerk replied and then asked, "Is this for a baby shower?"

"No," Geannie answered. "It is for my husband."

The clerk looked at her with one eyebrow raised and a puzzled look on her face. "Ohhhhh," she cooed as her face went back to normal, shaking her head in understanding. "Well then, congratulations."

Geannie thanked her and left the shop and drove home.

That evening when Curly came home, she carried on as usual. First things first, a hug and kiss. Then she asked about his day. He excitedly told about doing rolls and dives and whatever else it was he

did that day. When he finished, he asked her how her day was.

“I went into town and did a little shopping.”

“Did you find anything?” he asked.

“Yeah, I bought you a present.” she said as she handed the package to him.

“For me?” he asked as he took it from her. “Whats the occasion?”

“Just open it.” she insisted as he began tearing the wrapping off.

With a confused expression on his face he held up the dainty little pink dress. He tried to speak but was unable,

“Oh, and one other thing. I had a very nice visit with Commander Phillips today. He is such a nice man.”

Curly's expression became even more distorted as he was trying to process what he was hearing. Again he tried to speak.

She cut him off with, “Well, Lieutenant. We did it! I'm nine weeks pregnant!”

Curly was speechless as his face transformed from a look of confusion to the biggest grin he was capable of making. Without speaking he took her in his arms and gave her the tightest hug. Then he abruptly released her. “I'm not squeezing too tight and hurting the baby, am I?” he wanted to know.

“No. No, you're fine. You can't hurt her.”

“Her?”

“Yes, I feel very strongly that this baby is a girl. I even have a name picked out for her. I am going to name her Sandra, but we're going to call her Sandy.”

“Why Sandy?” Curly wondered.

“Because she was conceived on that sandy beach.” she explained. But then added, “No one else has to know that except for you and me.”

“How do you know that, Geannie?”

“Well Curly, I have been keeping track.” She reached for the calendar and took it down off the wall. “Do you see all these tiny little hearts?”

Curly shook his head. “I've been wondering what they mean.”

Geannie continued, “Those are the times that we made whoopee.”

Curly continuing to shake his head and exclaimed, “Boy, have we been busy!”

Geannie went on, “See these little dots about every four weeks. Let me just say those are times that might have been just a wee bit moody.”

“So you think that was time?” Curly asked.

“Pretty sure.”

“Well then,” Curly agreed. “Sandy it is.” Then he suggested, “How about Sandra Gean Brason? What do you think of that?”

“I like it!” Geannie agreed.

“But what if it is a boy?” Curly asked.

“I have thought of that too, Curly. Sheffield is your mother's maiden name. So I was thinking we could name a boy Austin after me. I haven't thought of a middle name yet.”

“I like that too.” Curly agreed and then he asked, “So when will she be born?”

Geannie answered, “Some time during the first part of November, just after you graduate.”

“So I can't hurt anything by hugging you?”

“No, Curly. You can't. Come here, Lieutenant!” she ordered.

As they embarrassed again Curly told her, “I love you so much, Sweetheart.”

“I love you, too Sheffield.”

“Oooo, That must mean you really love me. You never call me that. Hey, I'm not in trouble am I?” After another good squeeze, he loosened up enough to look her in the face and asked, “Can we still...”

She finished for him, “Make whoopee?” Then she reassured him, “Absolutely!”

Geannie was asked to substitute the rest of year for a teacher who had become seriously ill. That kept her occupied for the next several weeks. Between that and keeping up their home and tending her small garden and flowerbeds, she was very content. This was just how she envisioned things to be. The nausea had passed and she actually felt pretty good, except for the strange cravings.

In flight training Curly, was mastering formation flying. He was right on the mark in his progress. He had a thrilling experience the week before. He was at a pretty good altitude over the countryside when his instructor shut off the engine. The only sound was the whistle of the wind as it rushed around him in the open cockpit. The purpose of the assignment was to glide the plane in for a safe landing. The instructor coached him on how to use the wind to maintain momentum and keep his altitude. Curly orbited the runway as the aircraft made its decent. Soon he was at the correct altitude to line up with the runway. As he made his approach the plane floated to the ground and rolled to a stop on the runway. It was exhilarating!

There were a few who were ahead of the class and some who lagged behind. The biggest challenge he faced was the ostracization he received from many of trainees because he spent his evenings at home with Geannie rather than at the smoke filled officer's club. Even many who had their wives with them chose to spend their evenings there.

He didn't feel the comradely that he had felt on the Wadsworth. Here, everyone came from various backgrounds and where there for a number of reasons. When their training was complete, they would all be

going in different directions. Curly was willing to put up with it knowing that he was going to do what he loved. "Besides," he thought, "an assignment to a squadron would place him in a more cohesive group of men."

Curly's biggest antagonist was Lieutenant Miles Browning who seemed to go out of his way to make life miserable for him. He had graduated from Annapolis a couple of years ahead of Curly and was full rank ahead. He and Sheffield were complete opposites in nearly every way. Lieutenant Browning showed exceptional skill in the cockpit, but also exhibited a reckless attitude which struck his fellow trainees and instructors as potentially dangerous.

Finally, the milestone that every student pilot looks forward to with anticipation arrived. It was the big day for his first solo flight. He felt he was ready. More importantly, his instructor knew that he was ready. As he hugged Geannie that morning before he left, her belly was noticeably bigger as he held her close. The bigger it grew, the more radiant her countenance shown.

"Before you go, I have something for you." Geannie announced proudly. "Wait right there." A moment later she returned with a bright red scarf. As she wrapped it snugly around his neck she said, "I made it extra long so that it would blow in the wind behind you. That way when I watch from the ground, I can pick you out in the sky."

Curly admired it as he ran it through his hands. When he got the end he noticed, "Oh look. Its says, 'Love Geannie.'"

"That, Lieutenant, is to remind you that you love me more than you do your Jenny." Then patting her tummy she added. "After all, that airplane can't have your baby."

Embraced in another hug Curly assured her, "I love you more that anything and everything."

As he walked out the door, Geannie accompanied him as she was headed to school. "I wish I didn't have to teach today." she lamented. "I would love to come down to the field and watch." Then she cheerfully added, "School will be out in a couple of weeks, I can come and watch then."

Before his flight, he had a number of other things to do. He just wanted to get in the air. First there was the daily briefing in the ready room. The weather report that day was perfect. The flight assignments for the day were handed out. Curly was scheduled for ten o'clock. But first he had his bi-weekly visit with Commander Phillips. He spent most of the time asking about Geannie. Then the doctor quickly looked him over and sent him on his way.

Curly climbed into the open cockpit and the plane captain strapped him in. After checking everything, he signaled for the plane captain to turn the propeller. The engine started, coughed once or twice as it belched blue gray smoke. Then it evened out and began purring like a kitten as Curly kept his feet on the brakes.

A moment later he received the signal to begin taxiing. He let off the brake and the plane began to roll. Once he was in position on the runway he again applied the brakes as the plane ahead of him roared into the sky. Then it was his turn. He pressed the throttle forward and revved the engine. When the rpms reached the prescribed mark, he let go of the brakes.

The Jenny bounded down the runway and seconds later was airborne. Curly felt free even though he had been flying for three months. This time the rear seat was empty with no one looking over his shoulder. There was no one to take over either. His flight was all laid out for him. He had a number of prescribed maneuvers to perform. His flight was evaluated by a team of observers on the ground and two in the air who observed from a distance.

At one point in his flight path he flew near the school where Geannie was teaching. It was recess time and he could see that the playground filled with children. Most of them appeared to be busy at play except for one small group of children who surrounded their pregnant teacher. They all had their faces pointed skyward, waving enthusiastically. He didn't dare dip his wings because that was not included in his maneuvers. He didn't want to risk being scored down for appearing that he was having difficulty.

His solo flight went flawlessly as he executed each maneuver with confidence. Satisfied with his performance he lined up for his landing approach. He lowered the flaps and made his descent. As he cleared the end of the runway, he was just a few feet off the ground. Seconds later both wheels gently touched the runway. He pulled back on the throttle and plane slowed to a stop. Safely on the ground he taxied off the runway and was directed into the parking area. Once in place, he shut off the engine.

Curly just sat there for a moment with a big smile on his face. He gently patted the dashboard and removed the photograph of Geannie that he had affixed to the instrument panel. He tucked it into his shirt pocket as he rose out of his seat and climbed out onto the wing and hopped to the ground. There was a round of "ataboys" and pats on the back from those around him.

At the end of the day, Curly and the other student pilots reassembled in the ready room to receive their evaluations. Looking down at the sheet of paper he was handed, he saw a perfect score circled at that top of the page.

That evening Curly went home walking on air. Geannie greeted him at the door with a hug, "Hi there, Flyboy. I saw you up there today. With your scarf, I could easily tell it was you. Now, give me some love."

Curly gave her a kiss. "I saw you waving at me," he told her.

"Supper is ready. Come in and sit down," Geannie invited. "I want to hear all about your day."

All during dinner she listened as he excitedly told her every detail of his flight. Geannie listened intently even though she only understood about half of what he was saying. "Enough about me." he

concluded and asked "How was your day, Sweetheart?"

"Oh you know, nothing exciting. Just diagramming sentences and times tables." she replied. "By the way what is eleven times twelve?" she quizzed.

"One hundred and thirty two," he confidently snapped back without hesitation.

"Wow! I'm impressed. You're pretty smart for a fly boy," she razzed. "Are all fly boys that smart?"

"Nope."

"Are they all as handsome?"

"Definitely not! And none of them are as good at helping with the dishes." he bragged as he got up from the table with both of their plates.

"Well, I think I got the cream of the crop," Geannie boasted.

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The Navy's flight training program in the early 1920s was as described in this chapter.

In those days, telephone booths were called silence boots. Telephone numbers consisting of a word or name of a place followed by five numbers, the first two letters translated into numbers. Therefore Roanoke 7-6872 would have been 767-6872.

Miles Browning is a real person who graduated from flight school in 1924. He shows up quite often in the story as Curly's nemesis. His disposition is well documented in the biography of Admiral William F. Halsey as a rather obstinate person who didn't get along with anyone.