

Blast from the Past!

Contributed by Dana Rippon, Dec 2018

Dana recently shared a couple of hobbies he enjoyed in the 1980s. Here is his story.

As I recall, my neighbor and friend, a deputy sheriff, talked me into going in with him on an ultralight. The other owner was a computer science professor at University of Florida.



Dana Rippon



We kept the ultralight on a pasture near Orange Lake, south of Gainesville. It had a set of wheels and pontoons, so we could take off and land on the pasture or go lake

hopping. Orange Lake was full of alligators, so it was nice to view from a distance. I could also fly over Cross Creek and Micanopy, the sites of the movies *The Yearling*, *Cross Creek*, and *Doc Hollywood*.



The first time I soloed, the instructor failed to mention to me that Navy pilots occasionally buzzed Orange Lake for fun on their way back to Pensacola. Of course, they would pick that day. I got to a comfortable altitude; say, a couple of thousand feet, and was enjoying the ride when I looked down and saw the tops of two fighter jets skimming the lake. I hoped they saw me (probably not)

and said a prayer that I wouldn't get sucked into their intakes.

On another flight, a bald eagle decided to soar right beneath me. I looked down and saw him cricking his neck to look up at me, trying to figure out who I was and what I was doing there.

After flying the ultralight for a while, I went to an air show and saw a parachute team demonstration. I thought, now that's cool! It's like flying an ultralight, but without that loud engine a couple of inches from your ears. Hence, my excursion into skydiving.



The freefall is like doing a great imitation of a rock for about a minute, followed by a humongous jerk when you pull the ripcord. After that, it's a terrific canopy ride for several minutes. I liked flying the canopy the best.

A couple of fond memories.