

"TALES OF HOT-AIR FREE BALLOONING"

By: Kenneth E. Scheer -- March 2015

In the Summer of 1973, Bill Snider had been 'deeply smitten' with Hot Air Balloon flying-- in them he saw an important 'Advertising Medium' (as well as a 'will-pay-for-itself' Tax Deduction--) and an additional, unique, very attractive Sport Venue for his "Life Cycle Specialty Sports Shop", at 1224 15th St., in Larimer Square, Denver, CO. Having an FAA Certified Hot Air Free Balloon Pilot's License was the only requirement for 'Piloting' a Hot Air Balloon, and this was relatively easy to obtain, with 'Minimal Hours' of Student Pilot Instruction involved, because of the simple nature of the aircraft, and the ease of which Piloting could be learned. The only type of FAA Certified Balloon Pilot's License available was a "Commercial Pilot's License, with a Lighter-Than-Air, Free Balloon Rating, Limited to Hot Air Balloons (with or without an airborne heater)", and the Commercial Pilot was also 'Qualified to Instruct Pilot Training'. Only 8 Hours of Student Pilot Instruction by another FAA Certified Commercial Hot Air Balloon Pilot was required, along with FAA Written & Oral Exams on FAA General Aircraft Flight Regulations and Lighter-Than-Air (LTA) Aircraft knowledge, and a final 'Flight Test' to demonstrate Free Balloon flying skill & knowledge, given by an FAA Administrator or Official FAA 'Designee'. At that time the only Certified License for Hot Air Balloons was the 'Commercial Pilot/Instructor License' (there would be no 'Private Pilot' category until an Update of FAA Regulations in November 1975--). Hot Air Ballooning had been a very rare, and easily managed 'FAA Licensed' Pilot Category until the interest in Hot Air Balloon Flight blossomed in popularity in the early 1970's.

Piloting a Hot Air Free Balloon is not terribly difficult nor exceedingly dangerous, as long as the Pilot *strictly adheres* to some exceedingly simple routines & techniques which provide *safe* Launching, Free Flight, Landing, and Other Handling Rules and Skills; and who has a working knowlege of 'Micro-Meteorology' or 'Micro-Weather', and follows the Federal Aviation Regulations common to Aircraft Flight, especially where pertinent to Free Ballooning. It usually requires a minimum of 2-4 other Persons to act as a 'Ground-Crew/Chase & Recovery' Team, to assist with the Pre-Launch Layout, Inflation, & Launch, of a Hot Air Balloon, who then follow their Balloon's Flight in a 'Recovery Vehicle', and assist in Packing-Up their Balloon for Transport, after it Lands. Good 'Landowner Relation' skills, and obtaining Permission (if possible--) to enter on Private Property to enable Balloon Recovery-- is an important aspect of 'Crewing'. Most 'Regular' Crew Team Members are typically 'Compensated' for their participation and efforts, by *their* 'Commercial Balloon Pilot' offering an 'Hour of Flight Instruction' (toward a 'Commercial Balloon Pilot' License--), or a 'Free Flight Ride' which they may share with family or friends, as they may desire-- for every 3 or 4 Flights they attended as Crew.

Most typical Free Balloon Flights are conducted in the early morning hours, in 'open country', away from large populated areas and airports, just after sunrise, while the atmosphere is most calm (if the wind speed is over 6-8 MPH, it becomes very difficult, even dangerous to attempt a Balloon Inflation & Launch). Once airborne, if the wind speed increases (as it usually does-- with directional changes also occuring--) as higher altitudes are gained, it remains quite calm for the occupants in the Gondola, as the Free Balloon moves as a part of the 'Air Mass'. Altitude control is usually extremely precise in a Hot Air Free Balloon-- however, it will float in whatever direction the Air Mass takes it. Wind

speed & direction *varies* with increases in altitude, with 'Layers' often being found to change 90 degrees (or more) within 1000 Ft of altitude. A Free Balloon Pilot 'utilizes' these differences to provide the Free Balloon's only 'Directional Control' available; hence, the Pilot (aka: Balloonist, or '*Aeronaut*'--) never really knows *exactly* where he may eventually 'Land'. Typically, the only problems arising are sometimes the Balloon's ground-speed encountered upon Landing, or needing to avoid a downwind obstruction during Launches or Landings. Most Hot Air Balloons fly for only 1 to 2.5 Hours, and are usually safely 'Landed' before the typical 'thermal activity' builds up, and gustiness & wind speeds increase-- usually around mid-morning. Most Landings consist of a mild ground contact 'Bump & Drag' for a short distance, frequently with the Gondola gently & safely lying on it's side *before* it comes to a complete Stop (anything faster than @ 10-12 MPH is considered to be a 'Higher-Speed' Landing, where Specialized Flight Techniques are used to safely 'cushion' a harder bump and minimize the drag, before stopping'-- *every* Hot Air Balloon Pilot is taught these techniques). The safest Hot Air Balloon Pilots are prudent in choosing only very mild weather forecast conditions on the days they wish to fly, and *firmly declining* to fly if the day's conditions do not meet *all* favorable expectations.

Bill Snider's brother-in-law Stan Simpson, received his Hot Air Balloon Flight Instruction from a local Certified 'Commercial LTA Hot Air Free Balloon Pilot/Instructor', and earned his own FAA Certified 'Commercial LTA Hot Air Free Balloon Pilot/Instructor License'. Obtaining this 'Commercial Balloon Pilot' License required only the ***8 Hours*** of Instruction. This was, generally speaking, a 'minimum' of practicable flight experience for qualification as a Pilot/Instructor-- as most Pilots were admittedly safe, but still 'pretty green' until they gained 15 to 25 Hours, or so, of Free Balloon Flight experience before Instructing a Student Pilot of their own. A lot depended on any prior 'basic aeronautical & weather knowledge' the Student may possess, or related sciences or skills, such as 'Crewing' on a Hot Air Balloon Crew. Stan had learned well, and was an intelligent, knowledgeable, and safely skilled Balloon Pilot.

While Stan Simpson was receiving Flight Instruction, Bill had 'Ordered' a complete Hot Air Balloon with orange and purple vertical stripes, and a wide horizontal equator band in yellow (with large red custom lettering denoting "Life Cycle - Larimer Square"). The 'Life Cycle' Balloon was manufactured by the most popular Hot Air Balloon maker at that time, "Raven Balloon Industries", in Sioux Falls, SD-- the configuration & size designation for the 'LC' Balloon was an S55A (i.e. Ax-7, 77,500 Cu Ft 'Envelope' Volume--). The Balloon Envelope being made of a sewn, reinforced, 'Rip-Stop' Nylon construction, attached with small Cables to a Gondola made of welded 6061-T6 aluminum 1" square tubing & fiberglass panels, holding 2-20 Gallon Horizontal Propane Tanks, and a 4-Million BTU 'Dual Can' Rigid Burner System; the 'Empty Weight' of the entire System was 360 Lb. The 'LC' Balloon had an FAA Aircraft Registration number of N51499. In 1973, there were only a total of only 4 or 5 'Registered' Hot Air Balloons known in Colorado.

At that time, the typical Raven AX-7 Hot Air Balloon System cost @ \$9,000 for a 'Stock Design', and \$10,000 & up (to \$??--) for a 'Custom Design'. The AX-7 Envelope Size was the most versatile & popular Hot Air Balloon size amongst most 'Balloonists', or '*Aeronauts*', because it was capable of safely flying 3 to 4 Persons up to 10,000 to 12,000 Feet above mean sea level (MSL--), in average atmospheric conditions, without being close to exceeding (with average care--) the Maximum 250° F Temperature Limit of the nylon fabric (having a DNE Temp of 275° F). High Envelope Temperatures were generally only experienced when the Balloon may be loaded to near its Maximum Load Capacity, then

attempting to make an unusually rapid climb; or during sustained higher altitude flights where ambient air density was less; or any instance where increased Burner usage may heat the sensitive 'Crown' of the balloon envelope fabric to near its Temperature Limit. Smaller Balloons (AX-6) basically had a 2-Person Capacity, some smaller & very rare (AX-4 & 5), were of a 1-Person Capacity. During the early 1970's, a more durable U/V & Heat Resistant Dacron Fabric, and many other innovative Hot Air Balloon System design features, were being introduced by Tracy Barnes' "Balloon Works" in Statesville, NC.

After the 'LC' Balloon was delivered-- Stan then Instructed Bill, using the LC Balloon, with Bill's wife Kate, Stan & other friends used as 'Crew'. They all had a lot of fun acting as a Balloon Crew Team, as Bill was receiving his Instruction. Soon, Bill also became an excellent, knowledgeable, and safely skilled Hot Air Free Balloon Pilot. After Bill had Solo'ed, taken his FAA Written & Oral Exams, his FAA Flight Test, was 'Certified' and duly received his 'Commercial LTA Hot Air Free Balloon Pilot/Instructor License', he immediately began to make both 'Free' and 'Tethered' (moored--) Balloon Flights to attract attention and advertise his business. Bill then devised a method (with FAA Authorization--) to attach simple lightweight fabric 'Banners', to hang below the 'Equator' of the Life Cycle Balloon-- these could be custom painted (or printed--) with Custom Advertising Signage or Lettering designed for Commercially 'Contracted' Clients of the LC Company, then 'Free Flown' or 'Tethered' at specific locations & times. Bill also began 'Scouting' for 'Extra Regular Ground & Chase Crews', to help fulfill his Crew needs during the numerous Free Flights & Tethered Flights he was beginning to make. These persons were often found amongst the more 'enthusiatic' spectators, who were then evaluated, and perhaps enlisted.

In September 1973, both Dan Myers (a good friend of Bill's--), and myself, had enjoyed early A.M. 'Crewing' for Bill & Stan and the LC Balloon on a couple of occasions-- then in October, I got in a couple more *sunrise* 'Crew Trips'. Hot Air Ballooning was one of the most beautiful and exciting activities I had ever seen, I was as 'deeply smitten' as Bill & Stan!! Through regular participation, I was gaining valuable knowledge and 'hands-on' experience in Balloon Transport, Inspection, Layout for Inflation, Inflation & Launch--witnessing Free Balloon (& Tethered Flight) Flight Operations, Touch & Go's, and Full Landings; which included the complexities & vagaries of 'Micro-Meteorological' conditions which may affect Balloons--; and I assisted with Balloon Chase & Recovery, Disassembly, & Repacking, and 'Landowner Relations'. As my 'Crew Compensation' I decided to opt for Student Pilot Instruction. Bill remarked, "Ken, if you're interested in getting Flight Instruction, you'd better buy a 'Logbook', because your first day is probably coming soon." So, I bought one, and kept it handy. A Class-II FAA Physical Exam, & Form (with 'No Limitations'), had been obtained at a Medical Clinic in Denver, which was required for eventual 'FAA Pilot Documentation'.

Then, on October 26, 1973 while Crewing for Stan, on a very gentle, crisp & sunny early morning, north of Denver at Barbour Ponds, CO (just on the west side of I-25--), with only 3 of us attending, Bill, Stan, & myself (a 'short-crew'--) we got the LC Balloon inflated with no problems (with banners attached, advertising for KFML 98.5, a 'Free Form' FM Radio Station--), checked-out, & ready to launch. Stan surprised me by saying, "Ken, wanna jump into the gondola?"-- I didn't hesitate a second, I could hardly believe I was actually aboard, and going on my ***very first*** 'Hot Air Free Balloon' Flight. After the required 'Buoyancy Test', we lifted-off very gently, and climbed to @1000 Ft, where the wind picked-up, and we flew straight south rather quickly, paralleling I-25 (& attracting a lot of attention & honking from the highway traffic!). After @12 miles we began a descent,

dropped out of the wind, and landed gently in an open field, about 15 miles due south of Barbour Ponds, after a 1 Hr:15 Min Flight (landing before we got too close to some suburban areas, and the Denver Airport Terminal Control Area--). Stan and I were both grinning like 'Cheshire Cats', and I thanked him for the fantastic Demo-Flight. The Ground Chase Crew (Bill, solo--) was right there, and we quickly had the LC Balloon repacked & loaded into Bill's nifty, restored-stock, black '46 Chevy Pickup. Stan asked for my Logbook, and he signed-off 1 Hour for my *first* Flight Instruction. A happy, awesome, glorious day!!

All of my subsequent Hot Air Balloon 'Student' Instruction Flights, by the the time I had earned my own "Aeronaut Wings", on March 21, 1974-- (excepting one other flight with Stan, and also one with Russ McLain), were taught solely by Bill Snider in the 'Life Cycle Balloon'. Of my thirteen 'Student Flights' flown: nine were launched from out of (or from near), Barbour Ponds, one from out of (near) the Ft. Lupton Airport, one from 2 miles SE of Longmont, one from Foxhill Country Club at Longmont, and one from 4 miles south of Johnstown (with our friend & fellow Balloon Pilot, Russ McLain, co-owner of "Aquarius II", a Raven AX-6, as a guest Instructor).

Meanwhile, in November 1973, Bill offered me a 'Retail Sales Counter' Job at the 'Life Cycle Specialized Sports Shop'. This new job would allow me to participate in the LC Balloon Program either as 'Crew', or eventually as an extra 'Commercial Balloon Pilot', in the early mornings, and then work in the LC Shop during the remaining 3 or 4 hours per day (but there would be occasional Free Flights late in the day, and Tethered Flights 'Contracted' at odd hours & places-- weather permitting). Bill, or sometimes Stan-- continued to fly with the 'Contract Banners' about once or twice per week, and there were other 'Chartered Rides' to fly, etc., I was receiving @2 total hours per month of Student Flight Instruction, and getting lots of Ground Crew/Chase & Recovery experience, & observing Free Balloon Flight operations in a variety of flight conditions. This in itself, was a 'Ground School' of highest value. Once in a while, our Free Flights were shared with 1 to 3 other Raven-built hot air balloons-- Chauncey Dunn's fancy AX-7 "Deux Cheveaux", Sandy Branham & Jim Kernagan's AX-7 "Grape Escape", and John & Russ McLain's AX-6 "Aquarius-II"; and I witnessed an all too brief 'Test Flight' of a brand-new 'Barnes' AX-7 'Firefly' Balloon, the custom-paneled & astounding spectacle of the "*Dream of Flight*"! It was a unique & more interesting event with more colorful balloons *floating* in the vicinity; it always attracted lots of attention, with people chasing around on the ground. And it was nice to know that I was getting paid for doing this 'work'(!), and although still working in a fairly 'low-wage' job, I was earning a much better income than before.

During the Autumn of 1973, Stu Collins, a recent 'LC Sports Shop' Retail Sales Employee, familiar with the 'LC Programs', had seen an LC Balloon Free Flight, was 'happily hooked', and became a reliable, regular LC Balloon Crewmember, and friend. I invited my brother Larry to come along with me early one morning to enjoy observing a Free Balloon Flight on which I was Crewing (I knew he would love Ballooning!--). At first he 'flinched', I knew he did not like to get up too early for anything(!). Finally, he was talked-into coming along-- and he was very much delighted & amazed, as well as 'deeply smitten' with Hot Air Ballooning, like myself. He had a wonderful time and was all grins! From then on, Larry became a regular & reliable LC Balloon Crewmember. Later, Larry brought along one of his good friends, Mike Austin, who also became an enthusiastic, fairly regular Crewmember. Another fellow, John Matson, had witnessed a 'Tethered Flight' Demo in downtown Denver, adjacent to Larimer Square in a vacant lot-- was very impressed & excited, and wanted to come out to observe a Free Flight, knowing he may really like to help 'Crew'. John was

already a Licensed Private Airplane Pilot, and owned a Cessna 150 aircraft, which he flew for enjoyment, and as an amateur Aerial Photographer. We notified John, and he too came out early one morning-- was surprised to get a short, impromptu Free Balloon ride-- and was very much 'happily taken', and enthusiastic about Hot Air Ballooning. Thereafter, John also became a regular & reliable LC Crewmember, and became a good friend. All of these fellows soon became 'Crew Comrades', including Russ McLain's girlfriend Shirley, and Shirley's friends, Joyce Vande Hoef, and Barbara, who were also reliable, enthusiastic, and experienced Balloon Crewmembers. These women loved 'Crewing' regularly for 'Aquarius-II', 'Grape Escape', 'Life Cycle', and 'Deux Cheveaux', and were always notified of LC Balloon activities. These good people, including myself, and Stu Collins, & occasionally others, formed the 'Life Cycle' Balloon Crew-Team 'Roster'. The local Hot Air Ballooning people were a rather close-knit, and very friendly 'Flock', always happy to share Ballooning!

On a pleasant January 13, 1974, just after dawn-- Bill and I (just the two of us--), arrived at a favorite balloon launch site, about 3 miles east of Barbour Ponds. This was open farmland country, the land was covered in about 1" to 2" of crusty snow, but it was sunny & bright, cloudless. Bill wanted to photograph the LC Balloon in flight. If any given morning is basically 'dead-calm' (which it was), it is not terribly difficult for a 'Ground-Crew' of only two 'quite experienced' persons to carefully & successfully prepare, and inflate, a Hot Air Balloon. Soon, with the LC Balloon inflated & upright, and myself in the Gondola, I kept the balloon warm, while Bill packed the Inflator-Fan & gear into his Pickup Truck, and prepared for the photo-shoot. We had discussed a basic 'script', but had no walkie-talkies, so were just going to 'play it by ear'. After Bill was ready, I added a 'bare wisp' of heat with the Burner, and the LC Balloon *floated* gently, inches off the ground. I was airborne on my very first 'Solo' Ascension!! I slowly climbed to above the treetop & field powerline clearance level, up to about 500 Ft. above the ground (AGL), where there was a very slight easterly flow of air. I knew Bill wanted to 'Frame the Balloon' with the Continental Divide Ranges & Peaks in some of the photos, so I instinctively sensed which altitude to fly at-- while Bill drove around and set-up the 'shots' for his photographs.

It was nearly dead calm at the surface, and the only air movement was just above treetop level. I played with the balloon, dropping down into the next field to do a light 'Touch & Go' landing-- and the Balloon found a field-sized light 'eddy' of air and very slowly circled the field, right at the treetop level (I could easily land the Balloon and keep it upright without 'dragging' across the snow--). I climbed the Balloon and drifted into the next field, and dropped down where a similar 'eddy' flow of air caused the Balloon to circumnavigate that field-- and I performed a series of 'Touch & Go' landings. These were a series of 'Hops' from the surface to a height of about 60 to 100 Ft., then a descent to the next 'T&G'-- this was easily repeated several times. I could make the Balloon 'skim' above the ground, holding precise altitude control from inches to any fraction of feet. This was an ideal situation for some 'Flight Control & Landing Practice'. As a 'Solo' Pilot with the Balloon only 'lightly loaded', I was amazed at how little heat it took to initiate a climb-- and in initiating a descent, the Balloon seemingly just wanted to keep on floating-- it almost had to be *forced* to descend! At one point the Balloon was fairly close to Bill (on the road), so he walked out into the field to shoot a couple of 'close-ups', and to 'pan' the Balloon circuiting the field. Bill said he was amazed at the atmospheric conditions, and had shot some excellent photos-- and he well knew that I wanted a couple pix.

There was a farm coming up just a little downwind, and Bill said he had shot enough film. So, he & I agreed that I would climb the Balloon up to safely track above & over

the farm-- then look for a place to do a final landing. From about 500 Ft to 1000 Ft, the easterly air flow increased to @3 or 4 mph, changing to northeasterly-- I climbed to @ 2200 Ft AGL just to enjoy the beauty of the *panoramic view*, so I was better than a mile past the farm when I made my 'Final Approach' to *finagle* a Landing in another open field-- there, I was able to 'skim-fly' the Balloon right up next to the field road & open gate where Bill was parked. With the Burner 'Off', the Balloon was allowed to settle & cool itself, where a simple 'Deflation' was initiated, and we could both gently guide the Envelope fabric onto the clean snow on the ground. This was one of the easiest Balloon 'Recoveries' I had ever seen. This had been only my sixth Student Free Flight, and I 'Logged' 6 T&G's & 1 Final Landing, travelling about 3 miles NE of the launch point (but the Flight had 'tracked' about 3 times that distance), to Total **1.6 Hours**-- my first hours as '**Pilot-In-Command**' (PIC); the entry was recorded in my Logbook which Bill 'signed-off'; while I 'signed-off' the Flight Data in the LC Balloon Logbook. On the drive home, both Bill and I were smiling, as we swapped our 'Solo' Flight tales, and spoke about how incredibly beautiful the morning had been!!

Bill had bought, and had been working on modifying, a small 'snowmobile trailer' to carry the LC Balloon & all related gear. He added-on two 14" x 14" x 60" Storage Boxes (on L&R sides), with space for two extra 20 Gallon (S.S., Horizontal) Raven Propane Fuel Tanks (behind the Boxes--), so the Gondola & Envelope 'Muffin' Storage Bag (with Custom Weather-Covers) could fit in-between the Boxes; then he gave the Trailer a custom orange, purple, & yellow paint job with red lettering (all to sort-of match the LC Balloon--). The loaded Trailer after it was finished, could be conveniently 'Towed' by almost any vehicle (including most 'hitch-equipped' compact cars)-- this was then known as 'The Balloon Rig'.

On the day before a 'Big Event'-- Bill, accompanied by myself and Stu Collins to act as Crew Team, attached 'The Balloon Rig' to Bill's compact BMW 320i, and headed for Albuquerque, NM. Bill Snider & Stan Simpson (Stan later opted-out--) had both entered as Free Balloon Pilot 'Participants', in the "**3rd Annual - Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta**" scheduled for February 21st thru 24th, 1974. There were about 130 Balloons, of all shapes & sizes, from several 'commercially-manufactured' brands, as well as many 'home-designed & built' balloons-- accompanied by crowds of 'Crew-Team' members-- from all over the World!! All were Registered to participate in the variety of fun, crowd-pleasing '*Competition Flights & Races*', Seminars, & Parties, over the 4-Day Big Event. The Registrant Balloons from Colorado were **six**: "Stratosaurus-I" (Raven AX-8) with David Cessna; "Aquarius-II" (Raven AX-6) with Russ McLain; "Deux Cheveaux" (Raven AX-7) with 'Colonel' Chauncey Dunn; "Life Cycle" (Raven AX-7) with Bill Snider; "Grape Escape" (Raven Ax-7) with Sandy Branham; and "United Bank" (Raven AX-6) with Bruce Wellens. It was an incredibly colorful & friendly group of 'Lighter-Than-Air Aeronauts' from all walks of life!

The weather was flyable in the early morning of the 21st (many declined to get airborne for this Event--), and Bill then participated 'Solo' in the LC Balloon, in a 'Hare & Hound Balloon Chase', where the Hare Balloon flies a short while *before* the 'Pack of Hound Balloons' launches-- the Landing-Spot of the Hare becomes the 'Target' for the Hounds-- the *closest* 'Touch & Go' Hound Landings to the Hare Target are scored highest (T&G Landings being *mandatory*-- to prevent unsafe ground congestion at the Target--), then each Balloon will continue their Flight, to Land elsewhere. Bill scored reasonably well, but many others were closer to the Target. The weather deteriorated into gusty, windy conditions, and the remaining Flight events were cancelled for the day-- with enjoyable 'on-the-ground' Events, Luncheons, Seminars, & Parties, filling the remainder of the day. The early morning of the 22nd, was a Hare & Hound Chase repeat of the day before-- with

Bill scoring a bit better. After the H&H Chase was airborne, many Balloons chose to inflate & attempt to pleasure fly, but the winds picked-up once more-- and many Balloons were found to be making risky 'High-Wind' Landings, and were scattered all over the region!

Again, enjoyable 'ground-level' Events filled the remainder of the day. All Flight Events on the 23rd, were 'Officially Cancelled' due to gusty, windy forecasts. The morning of the 24th was much better, finer weather-- and the Final Event for the Fiesta, a non-competitive 'Mass Balloon Ascension' was scheduled. 'Life Cycle' with Bill Snider as Pilot, participated-- the Stadium launch field was rather small, so Balloons inflated according to a queue'd 'first-come, first-launched' courteous arrangement lasting a half-hour or so-- eventually successful in getting everyone who wished to participate-- estimated at *110 Free Balloons* (plus or minus--) all airborne at the same time!! This awesome Flight lasted an Hour to over Two Hours (for some courageous Pilots--)! The Balloon Fiesta was an extraordinarily exciting, and wonderfully pleasurable Event for everyone who chose to participate!! Many older friendships were renewed, and many new friendships were 'Launched' in the camaraderie amongst the 'International' Aeronauts & their Crew-Teams!

After getting two more Student Instruction Flights accomplished in January and early March-- with my final 1.1 Hours of Student Instruction 'taught' by fellow Balloonist Russ McLain, on March 17th (Russ would soon proudly become the *very first* Re/Max Hot Air Free Balloon Pilot--), and I now had accumulated **9.2 Total Hours of Student Instruction over a Total of 10 Free Flights as a 'Student Pilot'**; and having the additional valuable experience of uncounted 'Ground & Chase Crew' Trips. Earlier, on March 5, 1974, I was also administered my FAA Free Balloon Written Pilot's Exam (on which I scored 80%--).

On **March 21st, 1974**, Bill, Stu Collins, and I drove the 'Balloon Rig' to Barbour Ponds (now called "St. Vrain State Park"), and met-up with Cliff Elbl, the Regional FAA Administrator (who provided the L-T-A Hot Air Free Balloon Pilot 'Flight Tests' for Pilot Licensing-- in the Region). After the LC Balloon was prepared, inspected, and inflated-- with Bill, Cliff Elbl and myself aboard-- with yours truly acting as '**PIC**', we all went for a **0.5 Hour** Free Balloon Flight during which Bill (officially 'signed-off' an entry recorded in my Logbook recommending me to take the 'FAA Flight Test'--), and Cliff gave me the '**Official FAA L-T-A Hot Air Free Balloon Oral Exam & Flight Test**' (consisting of answering a few questions pertinent to Free Balloon Flight & FAA Regulations, and having me demonstrate a few Free Balloon Flight maneuvers--); we then made a nice Landing, close to the Chase Crew (Stu--). After which, Cliff said, "You're now Officially Certified as a 'Commercially Licensed LTA Hot Air Free Balloon-Rated Pilot', congratulations Ken!-- You're a good, safe Pilot."-- and 'signed-off' the entry in my Logbook. Bill & Stu congratulated me. too. I then thanked both Bill (for being my 'Flight Instructor'--), and Cliff (for his assistance and valuable services as our Local FAA Administrator--), and we all shook hands. The Balloon was packed-up-- Cliff was dropped-off at his car-- then we all went home.

A dream come true!! I was now a 'Fully Fledged' **Commercial Hot Air Free Balloon Pilot/Instructor**. My FAA License (Card) was promptly mailed to me (the 'Temporary Certificate' served as a Pilot License), which states: KES-- Has Been found To Be Properly Qualified To Exercise The Privileges Of Commercial Pilot, with a Rating of 'Lighter-Than-Air Free Balloon', 'Limited to Hot Air Balloons With Or Without An Airborne Heater'; (Signature of Holder): KES; Date Of Issue: **03-21-74**; (signed): Alexander P. Butterfield - Administrator. On this day, I also Officially became an '**Aeronaut**' (aka: a 'Professor',

'Doctor', or 'Captain', of '*Aerostatics*', a term traditionally reserved for '*Lighter-Than-Air*' Pilots! At this time, Colorado had only **6** FAA Registered Hot Air Balloons, and this author was the **15th** Officially Licensed Hot Air Balloon Pilot in Colorado!!; indeed, it was a *small* 'Flock' enjoying Hot Air Ballooning, mostly along the 'Front Range' north of Denver! A fine celebration among 'feathered friends' was duly called for!! A joyful time!! **YAY-HOO!!**

Most of my Instruction was taught by Bill, who was an excellent Pilot Instructor. Bill was always very complimentary on my flying abilities, and enthusiastic about my apparent 'natural' talent for both flying and handling Hot Air Balloons, claiming that I was a much better Pilot than he-- and had learned much quicker than he had. Bill wanted to 'Rejuvenate' his business as a Professional Documentary Film-Maker, and wanted me to 'Take-Over' flying the 'LC Balloon'! So I did-- so as well as being an Employee in the 'LC Shop'-- I was now '**Chief Pilot**' for the LC Balloon Program. And, Bill was also seeking a good buyer for the entire Life Cycle Sports Shop business. He and I discussed the potential effects of new ownership on the Balloon Program. We both agreed that the Program was a valuable business asset, and would continue to be so-- and that I was a most valuable asset & secure as the 'Chief Pilot'; and would be heavily relied upon to both manage the Program, and assist the new owners, informing them of the 'Details of a Program' which they would likely know little about!! I then continued to fly once or twice per week on 'Contract Advertising Free Flights' (with attached Banners), usually in open country, as well as often making 'Tethered (Moored--) Flights' for advertising purposes in various locations. I enlisted my own 'Regular Ground Crews', and over time 'Compensated' them with 'Hours of Hot Air Balloon Student Pilot Flight Instruction', or a 'Free Flight pleasure ride'.

Initially, I would provide 'Hot Air Free Balloon Commercial Pilot Flight Instruction' solely to the members of my Regular Crew & Chase Team who may be interested in becoming Free Balloon Pilots. A couple of them were already 'Student Balloon Pilots' themselves and may have had some Instruction Time-- and all were well-versed in the aspects of Hot Air Balloon Flight, Handling & Ground Crewing, Chase & Recovery-- so their 'Instruction' was a comparatively easy teaching & learning experience for all involved. Stu Collins, my dear brother Larry, John Matson, and Joyce Vande Hoef, were the Students I first wanted to concentrate on. Only 3 Free Flights were made in late March and late April, with only @ 3.2 Hours of Instruction taught, between Stu & Larry.

So, in late March 1974-- I made arrangements to move into a spare room (for cheap rent--) at my brother Larry's residence, at 4940 Newton St., in N. Denver, a rental which he shared with Mike Austin, his friend & 'Boss'-- (they were Construction Contractors in the 'Porta-Stall' steel building construction business, and they travelled a lot). At the Newton St. address, it was a 'Win/Win' situation-- there was thankfully an adequate & secure space to park & store the covered 'LC Balloon Rig' behind a tall cedar 'security' fence, in-between Flights, and I could 'keep an eye on things' when Mike A. & Larry were out of town (sometimes for many days at a time). Both Larry and Mike A. had become very enthusiastic 'LC Balloon Crew Team Members', and always loved to go on a Balloon Crew adventure.

By early May 1974, Bill had found his 'LC Business' Buyers, and Sales Contract negotiations were being finalized with the two gentlemen business partner Buyers-- Mike Bongaard and Al Green, who were friends (both recently having been Honorably Discharged from the U.S. Marines!). One Free Flight was 'Chartered' for two Boy Scout friends, and flown on May 8, 1974; Mike Bundgaard came along as an interested 'Observer'. Another Free Flight was made on May 16, 'Flying Radio Banners'-- Stan Simpson came

along, he needed Flight Experience time 'signed-off' to remain 'Current' with his Balloon License. There was a big 'Charity Charter' Series of 'Contracted' LC Flights coming up in which Stan would be the 'Co-PIC'-- With only Stan & myself in the Gondola, we had a breezy, challenging, inflation & launch, a 'High-Altitude' Flight to 13,500 Ft MSL (@8000 Ft AGL), where the wind had increased to @35 MPH. After descending, we had a 'windy landing', it was an 18 MPH 'rough drag', but we performed it safely, without any damage or problems. Stu and Mike Bundgaard were on the Ground Chase Crew, and both were 'Agog' at what they had witnessed, a 2.7 Hour Flight, for the 25 miles from Barbour Ponds to near Greeley! It was a very informative & challenging Free Flight, for all involved.

From May 22nd thru 26th, 1974-- With myself as 'PIC', and Stan Simpson (as 'Co-PIC'), the 'LC Balloon' was Chartered to fly a series of Charity Fund-Raising Free Flights with Special Banners attached, for a 'Sudden Infant Death Syndrome' (SIDS) Charity. This was originally billed as a series of '*Flight For Life*' Free Flights from Denver to Kansas City. The 'Balloon Rig' Caravan consisted of a 'donated' Winnebago Motor Home transporting two Charity Staff persons as drivers-- with Stan & myself, and hauling the 'Balloon Rig'; Stan's girlfriend followed, driving Stan's car; and Stan's buddy and his girlfriend, were following along in their car; they were to provide Ground Crew duties. Unfortunately, due to windy weather conditions-- only a couple of 'Static Indoor-Mall Balloon Displays' with Q&A Sessions and SIDS Info, had been made-- along with Local News & TV Interviews being made in Hays, Hutchinson, and Salina, KS (the SIDS Charity Staff had been fully 'Forewarned' about the huge potential for windy conditions in Kansas!!). The first visible Free Flight was made at Wichita; then came a late p.m. sort-of high-visibility, mostly 'high altitude' Free Flight to 15,300 Ft MSL! (14,100 Ft AGL!--) which covered @60 miles, on a spiraling path up & out of Emporia, KS, to Land 'in the dark of dusk' in a small soybean patch. This was followed by three quite visible Free Flights (one to 11,000 Ft MSL-- at Topeka, KS. The whole affair, was sadly, a bit of a Fund-Raising 'blow-out', and all our best efforts were largely unsuccessful in creating much, *if any*-- Charity Revenue for SIDS.

A few days after our return from Kansas, to Denver-- we had a Chartered 'Tether Flight' to fulfill, at a new 'Interior Decoration Supply Warehouse' in south Denver. With only my brother Larry along as a Crew Member, and the help of a couple of helpful bystanders-- in gentle air, protected by fairly large buildings on two sides-- the LC Balloon was 'laid-out' on the ground & ready to begin the 'Inflation' process. First, was the 'Cold' Inflator-Fan air-filling step, used to fill the Balloon to @ '1/2 Full'-- after which it can then be heated to make it 'Stand-Up'. During this 'Cold Inflation & Inspection' process, Larry came quickly around from his station at the 'Crown' to the Gondola, where I was using the Inflator-Fan. Larry said, "Ken, you better take a look at a problem near the 'Crown' of the Balloon, it's 'serious'"-- I shut-off the Fan, and went to take a look-- Larry showed me a 7-Inch long 'torn section of fabric', saying he had barely touched it, and it just 'gave way'(!). We closely examined the rest of the 'Crown Fabric', and gently 'Test-Pulled' a couple of spots using our fingers-- and the nylon rip-stop fabric consistently tore without much effort-- like a sheet of typing paper!! Scary!-- to think that shortly before that, we had been making several Free Flights (including a couple of 'high-altitude' Flights, over in Kansas!--).

Well, of course that cancelled the Chartered 'Tether Flight'-- and it also immediately 'Grounded' the Life Cycle Balloon, restricting it from *any* further use, until it could be hopefully repaired at an 'FAA Certified Balloon Repair Station' (in this case, Sandy Branham ran a local FAA Certified Balloon Repair Business out of her home--). Mike Bundgaard (now the LC Balloon's 'New Owner'--) and I hauled the Balloon 'Envelope' to Sandy for her

expert evaluation, to determine the extent of repairs needed. It was 'common knowledge', born from experience-- that the typical 'nylon rip-stop balloon fabric' had an average 'Service-Life' of around 400 to 500 Total Hours, or so-- and that the 'Crown' is usually where the weakest fabric shows-up first, because it has greater exposure to both the 'Internal Balloon Temperature', and 'Ultra-Violet Effects' of the Sunlight. I had previously discussed this with Mike Bundgaard, and explained that *before* the Kansas Flights, the LC Balloon Envelope had @390 Hours of 'Service' on it, and it now had gained 7.7 Hours additional, with a couple of Flights being made at higher-altitudes & under more severe conditions, in Kansas, so the problem was not an *unusual* surprise-- Mike agreed. Sandy proceeded to perform a 'Complete Inspection & Specific Technical Fabric Pull-Tests' throughout the 'LC Envelope'. She then reported to us that much of the *higher* 'Crown Fabric' of the Envelope-- in scattered sections above the 'Equator' had 'Failed to Pass'-- but the Equator & Lower Envelope had 'Passed' fine.

Mike Bundgaard and I visited Sandy, largely for Mike B's benefit, so he could better understand her descriptions. Sandy told us that she could perform a 'Gore-Section by Gore-Section Replacement' of the 'Crown' above the Equator-- and that it would require a few weeks of her heavy-duty FAA Certified Professional Sewing Work-- after which the 'LC Balloon Envelope' should be 'Good for another 400 to 500 Hours of Service', with care. Sandy quoted a Repair Price of @ \$7500 (if memory serves--), and Mike B. thought that was fair, and hired Sandy to make the Repair. So, the LC Balloon was 'Out of Service' roughly from the end of May to mid-July 1974, when the repaired Envelope was finally delivered to the Life Cycle Shop, and the LC Balloon was reassembled & prepared for Flight-Testing.

On July 18, 1974, Mike B. and I, along with brother Larry and Stu C.-- took the LC Balloon to Barbour Ponds on a fine morning, to lay it out, and perform a thorough Inspection (during the 'Cold Inflation'), then Hot-Inflate, and 'Test-Fly' the rebuilt LC Balloon. Everything appeared to be in great condition (Sandy was renowned for her meticulous Balloon Repairs, and her fine Technical Sewing talents!-- and she had often thoroughly Inspected the Envelope during her own 'Cold Inflation' methods).

It was a good day to get both Mike B. and Larry their very first 'Student Flights'-- so I put them both in the Gondola, and I allowed Mike to take the Controls first. We gently lifted-off, and climbed up to @ 300 to 500 Ft AGL, coaching Mike on Burner Heat & Reaction Times, how to maintain Level Flight, and how to Control both Ascents & Descents. It was gentle enough of a morning, so I coached Mike through a 'Touch & Go' Landing Approach & Landing, and the following Ascent. Then I let Larry 'take-over' the Controls; he had been in the Gondola before, on a couple of occasions when I was a Student with Bill Snider. So Larry already had a pretty good 'instinct' for the Burner Control, and knew what to expect making Ascents & Descents without much coaching. The whole Flight floated westerly for 2 Hours, until we were approaching areas having fewer roads, close to the Foothills SW of Longmont. I coached Larry on his Final Approach to make a smooth Landing-- and the Flight was over, with Stu C. close at hand for Recovery. Both Mike B. & Larry were 'pumped' with adrenaline, excited, and elated! I split the Two Hours fairly, they both had flown for an Hour apiece-- so I 'signed-off' an Hour of Flight Instruction in each Student's Logbook.

We then 'Cracked' a bottle of Champagne and 'Welcomed' Mike B. & Larry, properly to the 'Art of Aerostation', by following the Local Tradition of giving both a mild 'Baptism of Champagne', and sharing the remainder between us!! Another good day was enjoyed by

all of us. Mike was pleased with the LC Balloon & Program, and enthusiastic about someday earning his own 'Commercial Free Balloon Pilot/Instructor License'.

Cliff Elbl, the FAA Regional Administrator-- who regularly administered the local Hot Air Free Balloon Student Pilot's Examinations & In-Flight Tests, had requested that I do him a 'Favor'. Cliff's own Pilot's License was crammed full of almost every Certification for Aircraft Categories & Ratings, except for a 'Commercial Pilot, L-T-A Hot Air Free Balloon' Rating, which he coveted (strange, but true-- it *was not* a requirement that he be so 'Rated' to administer Hot Air Balloon Student Pilot Exams & Flight-Tests--). All he needed was simply to make a short 'Solo' Hot Air Free Balloon Flight (technically as a Student--) to be 'signed-off' under the signature of a Commercial Hot Air Free Balloon Pilot/Instructor; and as a friend, he had come to me with his request. I felt privileged, and was happy to grant his favor on July 28, 1974-- when we flew together for 0.6 Hour, then Cliff enjoyed an excellent 45 Minute 'Solo' Free Balloon Flight with two Touch & Go's-- and I signed his Logbook entry. Cliff was all smiles, and commented "I hadn't realized that an AX-7 was so 'sensitive' in Solo Flight, I almost had to force it to initiate a descent!" I just grinned, and said "I know, ain't it Fun?-- Welcome to the Club!!" Another fine day floating in the skies of Colorado.....

Earlier in July, I had joined the 'Federation Aeronautique Internationale', as a requirement to enter as a 'Pilot Contestant' in the "**1974 NATIONAL HOT AIR BALLOON CHAMPIONSHIPS**" scheduled for 8/2 thru 8/8, 1974, at Indianola, IA. Bill Snider was slated as Pilot, and I was slated as a '2nd Pilot'. However, Bill later decided that he would prefer to 'Professionally Film' some of the Events, and so relinquished the 'Official Competitive Piloting' of the 'LC Balloon' to me! Mike Bundgaard wanted to go-- but declined-- after all, "Somebody had to watch the Shop!"

On July 31-- A 'Caravan' was formed, travelling all the way from Denver to Indianola, IA-- with the 'LC Balloon Rig' being towed by John Matson, in his fancy yellow, powerful '1973 Mach-I Mustang' accompanied by Larry & I; Larry's buddy Mike Austin, was along driving his big, customized Chevy Van (fully loaded with Coor's Beer, to pander to the IA folks, who couldn't buy Coor's in their state!...); Bill Snider passed us by on the road, driving his nice BMW 320i. We all had CB radios, and kept in communication-- with Larry driving for Mike at times, during the long non-stop Trek through NE Colorado, Nebraska, & Iowa.

August 2nd was the official 'Entrant Registration Day', where theoretically **141** 'Competition Balloons' and **25** 'Non-Competitors' were Registered, totalling **166** Balloons! This was followed by 'CNTE Competitive Task' Events on the 2nd thru the 4th (weather-permitting, of course--), in both the mornings and afternoons (CNTE: Study wind directions, choose a Launch Point outside of a Five-Mile Radius, Launch & attempt to *Maneuver* over the 'Center Target', and make a flying 'Baggie-Bomb' Drop, then fly onward to a Landing somewhere-- closest Bombs to the Target Center to receive the Highest Scores-- each Competitor mandatorily must make two CNTE Scored Flights, at some point during the days of the Events, the CNTE with their highest score prevailing. On these same days, 'Open Flying' was also permitted. The 5th thru 7th, 'Hare & Hound' Events were scheduled (with non-competitive) 'Le Mans Start' Events, or perhaps with competitive 'Great Big Bender' Events, as well. The 8th was to be 'Barograph Tests' for only the top 12 Scoring Competitors (an attempt to Precision-Fly a pre-designated Altitude Course, the Balloon path to be duly recorded on a Barograph 'Tracing'-- the closest flight Tracing matching the prescribed Altitude Course scores highest--). And, the resulting 'Overall Scores' would determine the '1974 U.S. National Hot Air Balloon Champion Pilot', as well as all of the lower 'Places'.

The 'LC Balloon' & Team flew a 0.7 Hour Pre- Nationals 'Reconnaissance Flight' on the 8/2 (with Larry accompanying me as a Student Pilot--), and we enjoyed a good Free Balloon Flight. All flights on 8/3 were cancelled-- 'weathered out'.

On 8/4, the A.M. CNTE was flown-- with a breezy launch, and a rocketing 1400 Ft/Minute climb rate on the rather scary ascension, for myself & Larry-- we eventually dropped our 'Bomb' within @4900 Ft of the Target (which wasn't very good--), and continued-on to enjoy a 1.8 Hour Flight; later that P.M., the weather was better, and instead of a second CNTE, I foolishly flew in a Le Mans Start (and was the last Balloon launched, but it was a 'non-scoring' Event--). I should have flown my 2nd CNTE in this gentle weather!-- However, I enjoyed a fine 'Solo' Flight anyway, landing at sunset after 1.2 Hours.

On 8/5, in the a.m. I flew a 'Great Big Bender' floating to 5000 Ft AGL, descending to a T&G, then floating on to a Final Landing-- trying to *finesse* the sharpest acute angle between the two 'Bender Legs'. And I did pretty good, playing between the air layers moving in different directions, and happily achieving a 110° Angle, which is a rare atmospheric condition. Unfortunately, I was only permitted to have the 'Scoring Officer' aboard with me--, but we both had an exciting & fun 2.0 Hour Flight.

That same day, the 5th, in the afternoon, we fortunately chose to fly in a 'Hare & Hound' Event, which had an estimated **160** Hot Air Balloons airborne at the same time (some were 'Non-Competitors'--); I was accompanied by Bill Snider in the LC Balloon Gondola, snapping a few photos-- it was an '*incredible spectacle*'!-- we flew to @5000 Ft AGL to maintain a calculated course, but it was extremely difficult (with so many other Balloons maneuvering in altitude & converging, too!), to see exactly where the 'Hare Balloon' went to ground as the Target. Some Balloons had made final landings ('Non-Competitors'--?), and other Balloons *mistakenly* assumed the landed ones *may* be the Hare Target, and so made their T&G bump, and dropped their 'Scoring ID Flag' *in error*-- considerably 'Off Target'. We finally began 'tree-hopping' over the sort of hilly & woodsy terrain, and witnessed a few unlucky balloons snagged on fences or trees (with a couple Balloons draped over some low-voltage farm-field powerlines!--), and then suddenly found ourselves almost on top of the 'Hare Target'; so, we did a rapid descent into a Touch & Go bump (and dropped our weighted 'Scoring I.D. Flag', witnessed by a Scoring Officer--), then ascended, and continued to fly almost to dusk, trying to find a less congested area to Land in-- resulting in a very colorful, exhilarating, and incomparable 1.2 Hour Flight!!

That was the final 'Competitive Flight' for the 'LC Balloon & Team'. The 'Mass Ascension' scheduled on the 6th was cancelled-- 'weathered-out'-- (luckily, we had experienced our exciting 'Mass Ascension' during the 'H&H Event' the day before--). The 7th was the final day of the 'National Championships' Competitive Events, except for the 12 'Barograph Flyers'-- and having flown our 'H&H'-- the 'LC Balloon' was flown on a 'Post-Nationals' Celebratory Free Flight. I was accompanied by John Matson in the Gondola (I owed John a lot-- the whole Ground-Crew Team had worked very hard, but John had driven his Mach-I Mustang pretty hard, using it as the Chase & Recovery Vehicle--), so, as a grateful 'Thank You!', John Piloted the Balloon, and gained another 1.2 Hours of Student Instruction.

Out of the Four potential 'Scoring Flights' for the LC Balloon Team-- only Two were Officially Scored-- because failing to fly a 2nd CNTE Task made my entire CNTE Event a 'DNC'-- I never saw a Record of my actual Scores Per Event, it was 'Reported' that I had placed **75th** out of **137** Competing Pilots flying in the 'Nationals'-- which everyone on

the Team agreed-- that it was not that bad, for 'Statistically' being Scored in only Two Events! So, I didn't feel too badly about my resulting Overall Score, but I knew I could have done much better 'Tactically'!-- and should *not* have flown in that Le Mans Start-- 'Dang-It'!

It simply had not been possible to provide everyone on the 'LC Crew' with a Flight Ride, during the 'Nationals'. *Fortunately*, just observing the amazing Hot Air Ballooning Events (with everyone on the 'Team' holding a Chase Crew 'Pit Pass'--) was enormous entertainment, and there had been a lot of other things to see & enjoy doing-- and thanks to Mike Austin & his Van, we brought our own huge supply of 'Barley Pop' to drink! Mike's scheme to '*very* carefully & surreptitiously proffer' almost a Van-Full of Coor's Beer to thirsty Iowan's-- was a success, and easily paid for his Trip & Lodging expenses, and most of Larry's & John Matson's, too!! Every night, everyone on the LC Team was up till late-- chasing Balloon 'Groupie-Girls' and Partying with other Balloonists!! We all had enjoyed our fair share of the fun at the 'National Balloon Championships' in Indianola, IA.

In late August 1974, I rented an Apartment at 5206 Allison Ct., Arvada, CO-- and moved out of Mike Austin & brother Larry's house. They kindly allowed me to continue storing the 'LC Balloon Rig' in their secure area-- it was not a problem. So I began to pick-up & drop-off the Balloon Rig there, with every Flight. Between mid-August and early November, I continued to fly the 'LC Balloon' fulfilling the weekly 'Contract Banner Flights', during which I further Instructed my Student Balloon Pilots. A couple of 'Chartered Ride' Free Flights & 'Chartered Tether-Flights' were also made.

Eventually three of my Student Pilots earned their own 'Commercial Hot Air Free Balloon Pilot's Licenses', after being taught solely by myself. Mike Bundgaard was one of these-- Mike bought the entire "Life Cycle Sports Shop" business in late April 1974, after Bill Snider offered it for sale-- and Mike also became a good friend of mine; my brother Larry, and another good friend, John Matson, were my other two successfully Licensed Commercial Hot Air Free Balloon Pilots. All of them soon proved to be excellent Pilots!

In early November 1974, Mike B. was now 'Licensed' and wanted to be the 'Chief Pilot' for the LC Balloon Program, which was fine with me-- I was being 'Re-Hired' on the D&RGW RR. I gave Mike B. a timely & sufficient resignation 'Notice', with gratitude & ongoing friendship expressed. My final Free Balloon Flight in the 'LC Balloon' for 1974, was Nov 6th, 1974; after which Mike assumed the storage of the LC Balloon Rig. I wanted to continue 'Crewing' for Life Cycle, and also be available as an 'Extra Pilot, if they needed me-- Mike B was agreeable, and said he would quite likely be calling me to fly, from time to time. My brother Larry, & John Matson, were both now also 'Licensed'-- and, Larry, Mike Austin, and John Matson, all wanted to be notified for LC Balloon Crew, when needed.

On 10 Nov 1974, there was a 7-Balloon 'Rally' flying out of Longmont, CO. I was invited to make a Free Flight (long awaited!--) with Sandy Branham in "Grape Escape" N51518, for a wonderful 1.4 Hour Flight; I was able to Log 0.4 Hours as 'PIC'..... a fun day!!

In December 1974, I joined the "Balloon Federation of America" (BFA - Division of the National Aeronautic Association). I became a 'Charter Member' of the new "**Colorado Balloon Club**" (CBC), which had been recently organized-- which I had helped create. Soon, out of 3 or 4 graphic designs submitted for the 'CBC Emblem' Contest, I had the winning design! The CBC soon had about 60 Members-- the sport of Hot Air Ballooning had grown exponentially, there were over 20 Licensed balloons, and about 40 Licensed Balloon

Pilots in Colorado. The 'Flock' was now much larger, and the most popular region to fly was still along the 'Front Range' north of Denver.

The 'CBC' hosted the *first* BFA officially sanctioned 'Hot Air Balloon Race' in Colorado, on 5/10-11/1975. This was called "THE GREAT PINERY BALLOON RACE", and was billed as an 'Annual' Event at the "Pinery" (an 'exclusive high-end' suburban estate development), southwest of Denver. There were 25 Entrants from CO, NM, WA, CA, KS, IA, and IL-- and several fun competitive balloon flying Events were enjoyed in fine weather, over both days; CBC Members served as Official Race Staff, Coordinators & Judges-- 'Yours Truly' was appointed as the Official 'BFA Scoring Officer'.

- One of the last times I 'Piloted' the 'Life Cycle Balloon' was on February 20, 1975-- to give 1.2 Hours of Student Pilot Instruction to Stu Collins;
- Then another Free Flight was flown on July 13, 1975-- to finally give my Mom & Dad (individually, as desired--) a long-awaited Free Balloon Flight, on a beautiful mild day, at the Black Forest (Meadowlake) Gliderport. They had both observed a few Free Flights from the ground, so both knew what to expect-- but were still sort of 'nervous' & 'stressed' until we were gently floating-- then both grew more relaxed, with grinning faces-- and were happily exhilarated!! We flew for an Hour, up to 800' AGL, near two other Balloons (and made 4 Touch & Go's). Mom & Dad had a good time-- I knew they would, I was elated! Of course, we Celebrated with the 'Traditional Bottle' (or two--?) of Champagne!! 'Twas a very fine day!!

On August 2 thru 1975: I was planning to once more attend the '**1975 U.S. NATIONAL HOT AIR BALLOON CHAMPIONSHIPS**' as a 'Floating Crew Member' & Spectator-- however, fellow CBC Balloon Pilot & friend, Dave Mesnard needed extra help (having brought only one of his Crew along--), and invited me to 'Crew' for him, and I was honored to do so! He had '*home-built*' his beautiful red & blue AX-7 Balloon "Discovery-I", and had flown in the 1974 'Nationals'. Dave enjoyed flying once more in 'Competition', and I had fun 'Crewing' for him! Dave was habitually a very 'Safe & Conservative Pilot', but almost too casual, compared to most Pilots flying in Competition-- so he 'Placed' about midway in the 'Scoring Results', which was acceptable to him-- he was happy! Again, many new acquaintances were renewed, and new friendships made, among the many Pilots & Crew Teams-- an extraordinarily good time was had by all!!

- My *very last* flight in the 'LC Balloon' was a Free Flight on **September 5, 1975**, southeast of Longmont, CO. This was flown for Len Aitken (a good friend & fellow Film-Maker of Bill Snider--), who needed some additional film footage to 'round-out' a film they were working on-- it was a 'Short but Sweet' 0.7 Hour Free Flight.

My 1973 thru 1975 Hot Air Balloon Pilot 'Logbook' Summary:

- LTA = 92.1 Hrs; Instr Rc'vd = 9.2 Hrs; PIC = 81.8 Hrs; Instr. Given = 39.9 Hrs;
- 62 Free Balloon Flights, including 7 Flights above 10,000' MSL, and 1 Flight to 15,300' MSL/14,100' AGL (at Emporia, KS); 180 Landings;
- I had given *complete* Flight Instruction to three of my 'Ground Crew'/Student Pilots:
 - 1) Mike Bundgaard (the Owner of the 'LC Balloon & Sport Shop');
 - 2) Larry Scheer;
 - and 3) John Matson;enabling them to be 'Certified' as Commercial L-T-A Hot Air Balloon Pilots & Instructors, with only @10 Hours of Certified Instruction, as per the effective '8 Hour Requirement' for the 'Commercial Hot Air Balloon Pilot Certificate' Licensing Regulations;

- And, I gave FAA Administrator Cliff Elbl, 'L-T-A Instruction' on a 0.6 Hour Hot Air Free Balloon Pilot Flight, and 'signed him off' for a 45 Min 'Solo' Pilot Flight, allowing Cliff to be 'Certified' with an 'LTA Hot Air Free Balloon Rating' (about the only 'Rating' lacking on his Multiple-Rated Pilots License!!--).
- My final 'Free Flight' in the 'Life Cycle' Balloon was 0.7 Hr on 9/5/1975.
- Mike Bundgaard & the Life Cycle Shop were soon dropping the Raven Balloon franchise, in favor of obtaining a Tracy Barnes 'Balloon Works' (Hot Air Balloon) Dealership. The newly introduced Barnes 'Firefly' Balloons proved to be the apex of innovations in modern Hot Air Balloon design, and quickly became the most popular Hot Air Balloon around!

Summarizing 1976: the only Hot Air Free Balloon Flight I 'Piloted' and 'Logged' was for +0.5 'PIC' Hours (with +1 Landing--), on January 9, with my brother Larry, in the Raven AX-7 "Freedom" Balloon N1048R. Larry 'Certified' my 'Biennial Flight Review' (to maintain 'Current' experience--), as per FAA Regulations.

-- Then, during 1977 & 1978: No Free Balloon Flights were flown. **Drat!!**

In late 1979: With his zeal & nostalgia for Hot Air Ballooning finally getting the upper hand-- to the great joy & gratitude of several family members & friends-- my dear brother Larry Scheer, purchased a very nice-looking, little flown, 'Barnes Firefly' AX-7 (N2235H) Balloon, which he named "Lucky Seven" (i.e. 'AX-7'). Larry was an enthusiastic & very active Balloonist, and he flew his 'Lucky Seven' quite often. Many unique & beautiful Free Flights were flown in various locations along the popular 'Front Range' areas north of Denver, and southwards around Black Forest, as well as at Ken Caryl Ranch & Chatfield State Park-- with some Flights in the higher mountains around Steamboat Springs, and in South Park. Very few 'Lucky Seven' Flights were 'Commercially' oriented-- rather most were 'Private Pleasure' oriented, and always shared with a few other family members & friends, many of whom participated as 'Ground, Chase & Recovery Crew'. Most were treated to a 'Free Balloon Flight'. John Matson and myself helped to 'Crew' as often as we could. The Barnes 'Firefly Balloons' possessed many wonderful design innovations, making the 'Firefly' a far '*superior*' Hot Air Balloon System, compared to the old Raven-built AX7 Balloons-- 'Firefly's' were inherently more durable, much safer, and easier to handle & control! Larry owned & enjoyed flying 'Lucky Seven' for over two years; then chose to sell it in the summer of 1981-- this was the '*Final Chapter*' of our wonderful & incredible adventures flying Hot Air Balloons. We both had proudly and joyfully participated in "*our fair share*" of Hot Air Balloon Flight!! Other new 'Adventures' were awaiting both of us....

Over those few years, Larry kindly had allowed me to enjoy Piloting several unique & beautiful Free Flights in 'Lucky Seven', a few of which were as follows:

- In 1980, on February 3: I was finally able to share a Free Flight with my old friend Carol V. and her son Jess, out of Frederick, CO-- which was kinda chilly on the ground, but warm & quite delightful in the Basket!
- Then, on April 20: I was finally able to share a rather short Free Flight with my friend Dan Myers, out of Frederick, CO-- which we both greatly enjoyed!
- On September 28: Dad once more shared a beautiful Free Flight with me, floating low & slow for 3 miles, out of Chatfield State Park-- which he delighted in, of course!
- And, on December 14: I shared a Free Flight with John Matson, & his son Jeff, out of Frederick, CO-- to 10,600' MSL, made a 'Terminal Descent' to @1000' MSL, then

low & slow afterwards, which we all greatly enjoyed! (It was my 71st Free Balloon Flight, and I passed 100 Hours of L-T-A Hot Air Balloon Experience 'Logged'!--).

- In April 1981: I thoroughly enjoyed a 1 Hour 'Solo' Free Flight, out of Firestone Airstrip-- to @7500' MSL, 3 miles of floating slow & beautiful!
- On **June 27, 1981**: I once more enjoyed an incredible 'Solo' Free Flight, out of Black Forest (Meadowlake) Gliderport-- to float at 300' AGL, slow & scenic for 2.5 miles! My personal 'Glorious Adventures' with 'L-T-A Hot Air Free Balloon Flight' was sadly & regretfully **Concluded** on that day, with that 'Solo' Free Flight....

My 1979 thru 1981 Hot Air Balloon Pilot 'Logbook' Summary:

- LTA = +9.5 Hrs; PIC = +9.5 Hrs;
- +11 Free Balloon Flights, including a 12/2/1979 KES Biennial Flight Review (to remain 'Current'--), +1 Flight above 10,000' MSL, and +2 'Solo' Flights (one near Black Forest 'Meadowlake' Gliderport, CO), and +21 Landings;
- On 12/14/1980 I had officially passed 100 Hours in 'L-T-A Hot Air Free Balloon Flight Experience'.

***JUNE 27, 1981 - CUMULATIVE 'L-T-A HOT AIR FREE BALLOON PILOT'
EXPERIENCE DATA TOTALS TO DATE:***

- LTA Hot Air 'Free Balloon' Flights = **73**, including **9** Flights at or above 10,000' MSL (with one Flight to 15,300' MSL/14,000' AGL near Emporia, KS, and one Flight to 12,400' MSL/ 6900' AGL near Longmont, CO);
- Student Pilot Instruction Taught = **39.9** Total Hours, to *completely* qualify FAA 'L-T-A Hot-Air Free Balloon' Commercial Pilot/Instructor Licenses (or Rating Qualification) for Mike Bundgaard, Larry Scheer, John Matson, and FAA Administrator, Mr. Cliff Elbl; also including some 'Partial Hours' of Instruction given to other Student Pilots.
- **102.1** LTA Hot Air 'Free Balloon' Experience Hours & **91.8** 'PIC' (Pilot-In-Command) Hours, including **4** 'Solo' Flights, with **202** Safe Final Landings (including numerous 'Touch & Go' Landings);
- 'Moored' Hot Air Balloon (for Advertising or Demonstrations--)= Totaling **24** 'Tethered' Flights, for @**40.0** Total Hours.

THE BALLOONIST'S PRAYER & TOAST:

***"The winds have welcomed you with softness,
The sun has blessed you with it's warm hands.
You have flown so high and so well that God
has joined you in laughter, and set you gently
back into the loving arms of Mother Earth".***

"Hear Hear!"