From the Right Seat

Pete Rafle

While sitting at my desk the other day, I turned around to look at the bookcase, particularly the shelves where my accumulation of aviation titles is stored. I know I will give away most of these books to appreciative airplane people one day. But, first, let me share a few books I randomly picked off the shelf: “**Love at First Flight**” by Charles Spaulding and Otis Carney in 1943 is an amusing description of wartime Navy flight training that I found in a public library book sale. The authors’ memories were not far off from mine of training 20 years later.

**Flying and How to Do It** by Assen Jordanoff in 1932 is a wonderful glimpse into the flight training writing of the pre WW II years. The illustrations, black and white line drawings and cartoons, make it worth having this book. The cartoons feature a flight instructor “Guardian Angel” who imparts such wisdom as”You can’t beat the weather all the time”, and “Breaking the air rules may cost you more than the amount of your fine”. Another Jordanoff book is **Through the Overcast**, first published in 1938. I bought this book at a library sale in 1970. It is a very good example of early instrument training books and is also illustrated by line drawings and cartoons of the famous clown, Emmett Kelly. The cartoons show the “clown” stressing the safety points, such as “No man made mechanism is better than the man who runs it!” Jordanoff was a Bulgarian engineer who first flew in 1912. He had a legendary career in the U.S. starting in 1921. He wrote many popular aviation instruction books and manuals for the P 38, P 40, B 17 and B 29 airplanes during WW II.

**West with the Night** by Beryl Markham is a marvelous book describing aviation exploits of a remarkable woman in Africa in the 1930s.

Every pilot should read Richard Bach’s **Stranger to the Ground**, which takes one on a memorable flight in a single engine jet fighter over Germany about 1960, and his **Illusions** is a more spiritual book using aviation as the medium.

And, finally two books about the two “Non-Profits” that I worked for deserve a read for their historical importance. **Flying the Oceans** by Horace Brock is comprehensive history of Pan American Airways from the early days to worldwide jet routes. **Howard Hughes’ Airline** by Robert Serling is another “must read” for airline history buffs, or disgruntled ex-employees who need a deeper understanding of Trans World Airlines.

My fitting all these bits and books into my life has broadened my knowledge and enjoyment of aviation, airplanes and aviators in so many ways. I have had, and am still having, a great time!