

24 may 2009

Dynamic Flight School
Restricted licence course

2 years in Australia...and an experience, that will change my life... How did everything happen? Let's remember...

"Will you take me for a Hang Gliding tandem?"

Dave, my friend Stephanie's partner, is an experienced pilot and spends most of his time flying. He always said he could take me for a hang gliding tandem in Stanwell Park and that I would love it... Unfortunately we never had the opportunity to do it. And one day, Stephanie took me to see Dave flying in Forbes and organized for me a fly in the dragon fly, this aircraft that tows the hang gliders in the sky!

It was the very first time of my life that I was flying. When my feet touched the ground again, my heart was still flying and I had this uncontrollable smile on my face.

Looking at all this hang glider, I thought... I don't want to do a tandem anymore I want to learn flying!

And running everywhere with dreaming eyes and Dave preparing to take off I shout: You will have to tell me sometimes how I can learn flying!

The week after I went for dinner at Stephanie and Dave's place, thinking of asking Dave how he did come to hang gliding, how he did learn...very basic questions. And he told me: look, I just rang Rohan, and there is just one place left in a course in Victoria in 2 weeks and no other possibilities until September.

If you want to learn flying you have to decide right now! It's the best place you'll find and you will never forget it!

I wasn't prepared at all and didn't expect to be involved in flying so quickly. But I could feel something very special was about to happen and I should not miss that opportunity. In July I would be back in Europe and would probably not have such a chance anymore.

After 10 minutes of reflexion with great excitement I just decided:

I'LL DO IT ! I'M GONNA LEARN FLYING!!!

2 weeks later, I arrived at Trawalla by night, after 10 hours driving, in a place called Dynamic Flight School... I was a bit nervous. Everything happened so fast that I was not sure what to expect, I just knew from Dave that I would soon be able to do high-flights. I just had read half of the hang gliding course book Dave gave me before coming...

Everything else was to discover.

When I just arrived and discovered the school, hang gliding posters on the walls everywhere, Hang gliding videos, Hang gliding books... and a truly warm place we would share with my future sky team; I knew I would just love it!

And I did!

This 9 days of learning flying would be so intense that Phil, Alex, Tim and Finn would become my first flying-brothers! Like baby eagles in the same nest we would learn step by step how to fly away!

The first days we actually could not practice a lot because of the bad weather conditions, so we did a lot of theory. We did try to hang glide in a simulator in the flight park shed, discover how to settle the glider and how to walk and run with it on the ground... We had this interesting experience to try to steer the glider in very heavy wind while attached to a moving platform, but what we really first learned is one of the basic skill for hang gliding: patience...to get good flying condition for flying.

The weather is the one that would make you enjoy a flight or not...

Rohan, our instructor use to say : you really prefer being on the ground dreaming at flying than being in the air and wishing you'll be on the ground... So we kept patient, and looked every day on internet what the weather was doing, dreaming to fly...

Finally, this day arrived and we went to a training hill, a very little hill with a very regular little slop. We all went up and down this hill all day, trying to steer the glider with feet's moon walking on the grass and flaring the wings to stop... We had a lot of fun even if we all were very impatient to get some altitude!!!!

And the dream came true just on the next day! After some low tow to practice our landings, at the end of day 4 we get our first mid-high flight and on the next day our very first high tow, a memorable day!

... just imagine being attached on one side of a 500 meter rope which is attached at the other end to a white little 4WD car...hang check, radio check, picked up the glider, looking ahead, wings are levelled, bridle is clear and free, wind is coming down the runway, and... ready to go go go!

The car starts to run and I begin to make long running steps and suddenly my feet are up in the air and I can hear Rohan talking in the radio... airborne ! Climbing good! feet together, keep looking at the car...

It is getting smaller, I am getting higher. I feel some kind of vertigo... my heart is beating to fast, I think...No, I'm not thinking, just concentrating, amazed by this new feeling of heights, and feeling confident thanks to Rohan's voice keeping talking, guiding... I'm so high ! I wonder how can Rohan even see what I'm doing?! I can hear the sound of the rope vibrating on the base bar... No worries, Rohan told us this would happen... The car is running out of runway... I soon will have to release...

"Save release!" WOW I'm in the air, the tension of the tow is over! I feel like I'm floating! My heart is still beating too quick! I can't believe it, I'm in the sky! The excitement is so big but I just have to keep it still and try to focus on my landing... But I'm flying!!!!!!!!!! I try to control myself, I listen to Rohan, the ground is becoming closer...

"pull in a bit, keep this airspeed, look at the target, look ahead, run run run, relax on the grip, flare..."

I can't even remember if I did my first landing all right or if I did land on the wheels...

I just know that I touched the ground and saw everyone running at me. An explosion of joy suddenly came out of me, Rohan came to congratulate, I felt like in a dream, I was overexcited, this uncontrollable smile back on my face, I'm crying, I'm happy, I've never felt like this before, I'm lost, I'm so happy, so happy! It is just impossible to put words on it... I feel like the luckiest person in the world... I just fell in love with the sky! I just became addicted to flying!

On the night we went to the pub to celebrate the greatest moment we've ever lived! We were all ultra excited sharing big smiles that would not disappear from our faces. It was so good, We wanted more! Couldn't wait to fly again!

The days after we continue towing and flying high, improving our flights... But then, I had this very bumpy tow, and this flight where I did not feel really in control and after landing I felt very unsure, I lost confidence, wondering why I could not do as good as my partners... At this point I had to calm down, I could not fly again, I was too nervous... At this stage, my flying partners did support me a lot. Thank you so much guys, I was really lucky to have you!

Never let a bad flight take you down... Better learn from it, and don't wait to take off again! Then I thought that it might be the moment to ask Rohan if he would take me up with him in a tandem...

With Rohan flying I had absolutely no kind of apprehension, and I could enjoy the flight like never before... To see Rohan steering the glider was amazing, looked so easy! I could see how he just didn't care about these bumps and just let the glider fly and he could pass me on so much fun!

"Hey, there's some lift here!" Youhouuuu !

And we thermal tightly as I ask him to show me the steepest bank angle he could... It was just amazing. And when we touched ground I was back again, with smiles and shiny eyes!

"Do you want to go again" Rohan asked. "Again? Really? Of course I want!!!!!"

My confidence came back and I could fly again on my own feeling well, having fun, improving... Rohan took me back!

THANK YOU!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Afterwards, I just improved all the time and learned from every flight until we got the chance to thermal...

"Can you feel the lift? begin to circle"... I feel the lift, circle and get higher ! It's an amazing feeling!

Alex even went to the base of the clouds! He landed like a hero coming back from Mont Blanc! So cold! but so good and such a smile!

The adventure of flying was beginning... We just knew that it could only get more and more amazing!

Finally we get to fly from hills, flying with eagles, learning more about the sign of the nature and how should a pilot understand them, and trying to ridge soar... but the Conditions were not the best and we couldn't experience ridge soaring during the course ...

Anyway this day happen and I will always remember this 19 of May, few weeks after the end of the course, I went with Rohan and Toby, another pilot, to a mount called Mount Lonach. As usually, we first had a look at the landing paddocks and went up the mount to launch.

It was late afternoon when I launched... " Run run run , go straight, Turn to your left... I'm concentrating, listening to Rohan guiding me in the lift, hearing the variometer biping at me like a baby crow, telling me you're climbing, you're climbing, you're climbing!!! Wow , I'm still concentrating, looking at the cliff, in order not to be too close but staying in the lift... and suddenly I can hear in the radio, " How is that Christella?" Wow , I'm in prone now and over the launch! I can see Rohan from the sky! And I continue climbing! the earth is getting smaller and smaller!

Radio check... Toby is about to launch too!

Wow! Here he is, flying underneath me, it is unbelievable! We are both climbing together; I can see him progressing underneath me... "You're doing well guys, I will take the car down to the landing field, stay up as long as you can!" Rohan is going away! I'm flying alone ! Looking at Toby and getting higher and higher! The altimeter indicates 750m! Wow! It looks like I will never stop climbing!

"You should head to the landing field now, it is beginning to be dark".

I can guess Rohan's position in the landing paddock... It's true, it's getting dark... So I start to pull in the bar to land and realise that the landing won't be easy! I'm losing some altitude pulling in the bar as hard as I can... But I can't see any groundspeed! And there are only trees underneath me... But as I lose altitude, the steering becomes easier and I begin to gain groundspeed... Toby is very close. I will land before him, Rohan is guiding me... It is too dark now and I'm not sure about the wind direction on the ground... I land safely but on the wheels... with my heart beating crazy! Tears of happiness! I feel like the most emotional day of my life! I'm happy to share it with Rohan and Toby, I'm completely out of the world, I just can't explain, my mind is running crazy, it's the best I've ever lived!

Rohan found 2 white feathers on the ground and gave one to me and one to Toby... He explains us that when Indian American achieve something, like their first hunting, they get a feather until becoming a great chief with

a big feather hat. The comparison is beautiful, I will never forget this moment...

Thank you so much Rohan for all this joy, I just can't tell how much I thank you but I know you read it on my smiles!

Thank you so much Toby for sharing with me the most beautiful day of my life and for all the good time spent together at Dynamic Flight!

Thank you so much Tim, Alex, Phil, Finn for your support and for sharing this course with me, you are very special for me now!

Thank you so much Stephanie and Dave for opening up my eyes to this unbelievable world of flying!

THANK YOU SO MUCH DYNAMIC FLIGHT SCHOOL FOR THE FREEDOM!!!
I will never look at life the same way.

I'm still smiling, crying tears of emotion, feeling my heart beating harder when I think back!

Now I'm discovering this world of hang gliding and it's hang gliding community and I'm sure I will continue having great fun flying with them, learning from them and sharing uncontrollable smiles!

I can't wait to fly again! Youhouuu!

Christella