



BETH E. STANTON

UNEXPECTED INSPIRATION

It was my second season flying competition aerobatics in 2013. On Labor Day weekend, I was flying at the International Aerobatic Club's Happiness Is Delano contest. Rubi Vazquez from Durango, Mexico, visits her uncle in Delano, California, each summer. She and a friend came to check out the contest and were standing off to the side of the FBO. Noticing them, I went over

and introduced myself. As we chatted about how an aerobatic contest works, she could not take her eyes off the planes on the ramp. I asked her if she ever wanted to learn to fly. She nodded an enthusiastic yes, but shyly noted that her English was not the best and that training seemed really expensive. As a pilot of just two years myself, I was still marveling at the fact that I had actually accomplished this. I declared, "If I can do it, you can do it."

The following August, the Delano contest was host to the U.S. Open West Championships. I found myself in first place in the Sportsman category going into the final flight; it was mine to win or lose. Deep in the zone, I walked toward the plane to saddle up. A young woman approached me and asked if I remembered her. Startled out of my trance, I drew a momentary blank. She prompted, "I'm Rubi, from last year." Reaching into her purse, she proudly pulled out a newly minted pilot certificate. Recollection flooded back. "I kept remembering what you told me, 'If I can do it, you can do it,'" she said. My throat got tight as I stared at the plastic card in her hand. It was overwhelming. You never know how an inadvertent word can be that tiny bit of encouragement that tips the scales.

As I taxied to the run-up area, I had a huge smile on my face. The plane seemed to spring off the runway with extra lift on takeoff. Flying that sequence was pure joy. When I received my first place trophy that evening, I whispered a silent *gracias* to courageous Rubi who dared to make her dream come true. I promised to take her on an aerobatic flight. We weren't able to arrange it before she had to go back to Mexico, but we vowed to make it happen the next year.

We were exchanging e-mail as the 2015 Delano contest approached. By now, she had also earned her U.S. FAA cer-

tificate and was getting time in the right seat of a C208 and AC95 with some professional pilot friends. After volunteering all weekend at the Delano contest, it was time for our flight in the Super Decathlon. After a safety briefing, we cinched on her parachute and ratcheted her down tight in the five-point harness in the back seat.



A tandem-seat tailwheel airplane was new to her. On the way to the practice area, she took the plane and got a feel for the controls. We started off easy with some gentle loops and rolls. We next did a spin, and saved a

hammerhead for last—a vertical upline, pivot, followed by a vertical downline. The look on her face was pure glee. It was a great honor of my life when Rubi told me, "Thank you for showing me the world of aerobatics and to see what women can do."

Rubi resolved to become a pilot after she began studying math in college but did not feel passionate about it. She decided to do what she really wanted: fly. She started flight school in January 2014 in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, and was the only female in her class. She finished five months later. Rubi's future goals are to get her FAA commercial, then Mexican certificate. She envisions flying in the executive sector within the next few years.

"For me, the best part of flying is how we can connect the world," she said. She has decided that with practice and dedication she can do anything. "I've always believed that people should do the things they love," she said. ➔

.....
Beth E. Stanton, WAI 49924, is a competition aerobatic pilot and president of the Northern California Chapter 38 of the International Aerobatic Club. Beth is a writer, speaker, and entrepreneur. She can be reached at bethestanton@gmail.com.