

September 26, 2008 - Oh Happy Day!!

I previously mentioned that the impetus and inspiration for my making this 8,000 mile trip around the US was due, in large part, when I read "The Cannibal Queen", a book penned by [Stephen Coonts](#). Mr. Coonts, is a noted author of 28 adventure novels, at least two of which were made into blockbuster films ("Under Siege" & "Flight of the Intruder") In addition to his writing skills, he is an practicing attorney.

I read "Cannibal Queen" twice. (By the way, the name of his Stearman was derived from the fact that if you did not pay extraordinary attention to landing techniques, that tail dragger would "eat you alive... like a cannibal". The book is an autobiographical account of his 1991 summer airplane trip across the United States, part of which was taken with his teenager son, David and which provided for a bonding experience. During this aerial excursion Steve met many interesting and unique people...much as I have during my adventure.

In that regard, after I completed my project at a client's sawmill, I got into a conversation with its owner, Casey Wallace, about flying. Casey, and the plants previous owner, Don Judy are both pilots, and the topic of my trip came up, in which I referenced the above book. "Well, you know that Mr. Coonts lives just down the road?", said Casey. "In fact, I just saw him the other day in town." That was all that I needed to hear, and after some directions I made the 8 mile drive to his farm with its private grass airstrip. As luck would have it, he was home! In July, just before my trip begun, I wrote this e-mail to Mr. Coonts, and received the following response from him:

Steve

I just wanted to let you know how much your book, Cannibal Queen has influenced me in my desire to resume flying, after a dozen year hiatus. When I learned of the Light Sport aircraft and pilot rule a few years ago, I decided to assemble a kit plane, and recently completed my Just Aircraft Highlander. Like your Stearman. It is a taildragger and it also flies low and slow, but at a much gentler 5 GPH. Several years ago a friend lent me a paperback copy of your open cockpit exploits. I resolved, should I ever get back to flying, after having given it up when I reached 5,000 logged hours, that I would attempt a 'round the country trip like yours. That day has finally come, and I will be chronicling it in my on-line blog, www.haveplanewilltravel.info. The big difference is that I will be combining my motor home, pulling the trailer housing my plane, and a Vespa motor scooter, in order to make this trip in comfort and a degree of luxury. At 68 I have become a bit of a candy ass. I much enjoyed re-reading your adventures over this past 4th of July holiday, and should I get myself killed on this adventure, you will hear from me.

Frank T. Caruso

Frank - I don't want to hear it if you kill yourself. Watch the weather and talk to Flight Service. And have a ton of fun!

Best wishes,

Steve Coonts

It was great having the opportunity to finally meet Stephen Coonts, and to have him congratulate me personally for "not having had killed myself". And, although I didn't get a chance to fly, it was, none the less, "a happy day"!



Photo of Stephen Coonts from his 1991 trip in the Cannibal Queen Stearman bi-plane



Mr. Coonts, today, at his West Virginia farm



This is his private farm airport and hanger



Steve Coonts congratulates me on not having had killed myself on this trip around the US