



My Testament

By Kendra Byas Green, mother of a future pilot

As a parent, we instill in our children that they can be whatever they want to be. We want them to dream big and reach for the stars. But what happens when your child believes this and you now have the responsibility, as a parent, to foster their interest? So, this is my story. Now that I look back, my son began showing interest in flying at an early age, I'm talking 3 to 4 years old. He liked things that were loud and fast, like firetrucks and motor cycles, and he was in awe of airplanes.

A week after his 8th birthday, we took a flight to Jamaica to attend my sister's wedding and it was during that time in the airport that I realized he really had an interest in airplanes. The questions about planes and the amazement of its size and ability to fly held his interest. From that day on he would read about airplanes, watch television shows on them, researched them on the internet and watch any movie where airplanes were a major subject. He watched, *Red Tails* about the Tuskegee Airmen, which was his favorite. He learned about the different types of planes and would call them out by name when he saw them. Around 5th grade, whenever someone asked him what he

wanted to be when he grew up the response was always a football player and a pilot. It was then I told my husband we had to do more. I had no clue what that meant but just as I fostered his love of football, I knew I had to foster his love of flight. We began visiting places like the Tuskegee Airman National Historic Site & Museum, finding websites for him to explore more, but the moment I found the aeronautics camp at the Carolinas Aviation Museum around 7th grade, the interest and excitement kicked in to high gear! He was in love with that camp. The education he gained and the ability to actually use a flight simulator sealed the deal. At the end of that camp the instructor said to me, "I've never had a student to be able to do the things that RJ has on the simulator, and if he is serious about this, we needed to connect with a Young Eagles chapter." So on September 30, 2018 I reached out by email to the Young Eagles Chapter 309 to enroll my 14 year old son. I honestly can't recall why he did not join at that time, but we didn't continue the process. He attended that camp for two years before he aged out. I continued to foster his interest as it didn't change. We found a different Young Eagles chapter and took the exploratory flight in January 2019, but that particular chapter did not seem to have any activities where a kid could get involved. So, we continued on our own. We bought the flight simulator software and yoke for his laptop and that would hold his interest for hours. For me, it was better than him being on the Xbox.

When the pandemic hit it was even harder to find things for him to do to keep growing his knowledge and interest. On January 24, 2021 (two years after his exploratory flight), while scrolling through social media, I saw a post looking for teenagers interested in a scholarship to learn to fly. So, I did what I normally do, I dug deeper and responded to the post not knowing what this was about but I knew that they were speaking about the interest my son had. I received an email from a gentleman by the name of Johnny White with Vision Builders asking me and my son to do a Zoom call to learn more about the opportunity and for him to learn more about us. OK, sure, we're talking a scholarship which will put him one step closer to his goal! A few days after the meeting we learned that RJ was selected to move to the next phase which was to apply for the scholarship and to attend an interview with a Young Eagle Chapter 309 Scholarship Board. There goes that name again, "Young Eagles Chapter 309", so maybe it was meant to be. Anyway, on February 17th we received information from the Young Eagles Chapter 309 about the process to apply for the scholarship. We took the list, yes, it was a list of things, and began checking items off. We created a resume to introduce RJ to the scholarship committee, which included bio info, scholastic achievements, current grades, community and school activities, any flying experience/training and a one page essay. Four days later we submitted RJ's application for the scholarship. Once that was submitted we received a list of things the committee suggested you do before the interview which would be scheduled in March. Again, we did our best to check things off the list. This included things like: getting a pilot medical exam, student pilot license, etc.

This is what I now attributed to digging in deep to help my son reach his goal. On March 8th, we drove to Huntersville for our 7PM interview. It went well and we felt good about it but knew that we were the new kids on the block and we'd just wait to see how it turned out. On March 12th we received an email notifying us that RJ was not selected for the scholarship but that the Chapter wanted to help him reach his goals of flying. He was invited to join the chapter activities. While we were saddened by the news, I encouraged RJ to stay connected to the Chapter as he would be surrounded by current and retired pilots who had knowledge I would never be able to find elsewhere. So we attended their weekly Saturday builds where they were building a remote control glider. And we were connected to Paul Grieshaber, who served in a mentorship role to help us become oriented to the group. This connection proved to be amazing!!

Paul was impressed with what he knew of RJ and made it his goal to help raise scholarship funds specifically for RJ to learn to fly. We were blown away to learn this. In the meantime, he took RJ under his wing and began to build a relationship with our family and his. In May of 2021, Paul informed RJ that he would like to be a part of his flight training and made plans to take RJ up for his first flight the weekend of Memorial Day. Needless to say, this was just the beginning. On May 25th, we received a phone call from John Wigney, the Scholarship Coordinator. His call was to inform us that one of the scholarship recipients had a change of heart and declined the scholarship, and that it was decided that the scholarship would be awarded to RJ!!! OMG!!! It was a celebration in our house that night. We truly believe that God had been putting the pieces in place to help RJ reach his goal. The events that got us to where we are today seemed to be happening just by chance, so we knew it had to be a higher power at work. RJ spent the summer of 2021 in flight training. On July 8th, he flew his first solo flight. While he still has a long way to go, he is so much further along than I ever thought we would be. RJ continues to train with Paul G, affectionately known as Mr. Paul or Pablo. This fall he will be applying to the Elizabeth City State University and Hampton University in hopes of being accepted into their Flight Education Program.

So, when your child has lofty goals, foster it and do all you can to help them learn as much as possible. You don't have to be educated in the field of interest, you just need to be willing to find people and places to help educate your child. As RJ's parent, I feel like I've accomplished my job of helping my child attain his dream even though we still have far to go. We would like to say thank you to Johnny White, Paul Grieshaber, John Wigney, Vision Builders, and Young Eagles Chapter 309. None of this would be possible without these individuals and organizations. And we solicit prayers for RJ in his quest to become a commercial pilot.

Thank you for this awesome opportunity.