

# The Girl Who Taught Me to Fly

by Jon Myhre

A little ceramic sculpture of a bear climbing a tree has a permanent place on my mantle. It is my link to a day long ago when I experienced flight—unaided by airplane, glider, or parachute. It is also a link to an enduring love.

On that day I was nineteen, and in my second year in the College of Architecture and Design, University of Michigan. I'd planned to spend the afternoon working

slipping down his nose. "What on earth are you doing?"

"Looking out the window."

"You'd better get your butt on that drafting stool and get that plan of yours to work. You know what happens when we hand stuff in late."

Bob was right; the plan had to work before I could build the required model of

now, besides wasting even more time?"

I pointed to my finished plan. "Come here, Bob; I want you to see this."

"Why? You haven't done anything on it since yesterday."

"Oh yes I have." He smirked, and ambled over to my drafting board. I pointed down.

"Look; the dining room overlooks the courts, the main entry is right off the parking lot, and the circular drive makes it easy for people to be dropped off."

Bob stared at the drawing. "It actually works. When did you do that, last night?"

"No, just now."

"What do you mean, 'just now'?"

"Right after you buzzed in here making noise."

He gave me a look and went back to his drafting board, in no mood to discuss my veracity any further.

Pleased with myself, I started work on my model. He watched me trying to cut thick cardboard with a razorblade knife.

"Hey Myhre; haven't you ever heard of a jigsaw?"

I gathered up the pieces of cardboard, and went downstairs where the shops were located. The wood shop was one big room filled with machines and hand tools hung on the walls. It appeared empty at first, but just before I turned on the jigsaw, I noticed a movement. On the other side of the shop was a slim girl with long brunette hair. She had her back to me, and her snug blue skirt covered the most perfect bum I had ever seen. I wanted to see her face.

She seemed to be looking for something. As she turned toward me, her hair flipped back to reveal an adorable pixie-like face that, together with her bum, got my hormones dancing a tango.

I stood there gaping as she strode toward me and with a musical Midwestern twang asked, "Do you know where the hacksaws are?"

"I'll get one for you," I stammered, after a period of suspended animation. I handed her the hacksaw, and in the steadiest voice I could muster, asked "What are you going to use it for?"

She held up a heavy wire clothes hanger. I've got to make this into a ceramic sculpture armature, you know, the thing you build the clay around. Kind of silly using a clothes hanger, isn't it?"

Not silly to me. That clothes hanger has made it possible to meet you; I love that clothes hanger!

I needed to say something so she would stick around.

"What kind of sculpture are you making?"

"Promise you won't laugh if I tell you."

I held up two fingers, and said "Scout's honor."

"Well, It's going to be of a bear climbing a tree."

I liked the idea and didn't have the least tendency to laugh. "Sounds whimsical. Want me to help you with that armature?"

She hesitated, looked at the clothes hanger, and frowned. Just as my confidence began to slip, she smiled. "Yeah, I would appreciate that." She pointed at two places on the hanger. "It needs to be cut here—and there."

As I cut, I asked what her major was.

"Fine Arts, I'm just taking a sculpture class here for fun."

A little bomb of panic exploded in my gut. I didn't know what 'Fine Arts' meant; she'd think I was an idiot. Before I could betray my ignorance, she saved me.

"What's yours?"

"Architecture." I said proudly.

"My dad works for an architect!"

"Really? Which one?" I hoped it was one of the famous ones I'd heard about.

"Beyster's in Detroit."

I'd never heard of them, but didn't care. Her dad worked for them; that made them the best in the world.

"Is he a designer?" Design was my passion at the time.

"No, he sells Beyster's services to school boards."

I couldn't think of anything to say since I didn't know anything about school

boards. I'd learn all about them though, if she wanted me to.

After I finished cutting the clothes hanger, she looked at the clock on the wall. "Golly, I'd better get going, I have kitchen duty today."

"Kitchen duty?"

"Yeah, I live in a co-op house."

I knew a little about co-op houses, and remembered the name of one near my dormitory. "Are you in Cheever House?"

"Yeah, where do you live?"

"East Quad."

She smiled and said "Hey, we're neighbors."

She's interested in me; she must be interested in me, or she wouldn't have said we're neighbors! I felt my feet rise gently off the floor.

"I'm Jon Myhre."

She reached out a hand. "Ean Olson."

When my hand touched hers an electric current flooded my entire body. I fought off the compulsion to grab the rest of her. Shaken, I tried to appear calm. "Pleased to meet you. I'd love to see how your sculpture turns out."

She smiled shyly. "You will." She walked toward the door, then turned to wave at me. "Bye for now."

High as a weather balloon, I drifted up the stairs to my drafting table. I'd forgotten all about cardboard and jigsaws. Bob, still hard at work, glanced up. "What the hell happened to you? You look higher than a kite. Hey--you smoking something?"

I grinned. "Nope. Met this girl in the shop. She showed me..."

"She showed you what...how to get high?"

"Much better than that, man. She taught me to fly!"

I spent the remainder of the afternoon walking through the university arboretum, dreaming of Ean. That evening I phoned Cheever House, a woman answered and I asked for Ean Olson. "There's no one here by that name." I felt my heart fall like a rock in water. Did she have so many guys chasing her that she'd lead me astray? Had

I said or done something that put her off? Had I misunderstood her name?"

Her name. That Midwestern twang. "Is there a girl there that has a name something like Ean Olson?" A pause. "I think so. Ann Rowson. Want me to get her for you?" My heart turned over. "Yes!" I managed to blurt out. After what seemed an eternity, I heard the voice of the girl in the wood shop. "Ean Olson speaking." Ean Olson indeed. It was Ann Rowson, the girl who'd taught me to fly.

On our first date we attended a movie, a French comedy entitled *Mr. Hulot's Holiday*. A year later we were married in the most beautiful church in Michigan, on the campus of Cranbrook Academy of Art.

Ann and I had thirty-nine years of the most wonderful marriage one could hope for, until her death from cancer parted us on the 4th of July, 1995. Our two beautiful daughters, Kim and Robin, helped me put on her wake, which was attended by scores of family members and friends. And afterward, my wife taught us that love reaches beyond all boundaries, even that realm we call death.

Exhausted at the end of the wake, we decided to watch a sci-fi video Robin had picked up at the local video store, and leave the cleaning up of the house until morning. We put the video in the player, but instead of the sci-fi video, *Mister Hulot's Holiday* flashed across the screen. At the same time, we noticed a little ceramic sculpture of a bear-climbing-a-tree on a table by the couch. No one remembered putting it there.

Ann Rowson Myhre taught me how to fly, Will she teach me to soar even higher some day? Yes--I believe she will.

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Jon and Ann Myhre 1956

on the floor plan of a tennis club, a project due the following week. As I sharpened my drafting pencils, I glanced out the window, hoping to see girls from a sorority house. My eyes were drawn to the sorority house lawn, carpeted with white blossoms from a dogwood tree.

The bang of a metal drafting tool box being plunked down jerked me out of my reverie. It belonged to my fraternity brother and confidant, Bob Johnson. Like me he wore desert boots, jeans, and a turtleneck; the standard architectural student uniform we thought made us look special. Bob peered at me over the wire rimmed reading glasses that were always

the tennis club. He was almost finished with his model. I taped the unresolved plan to the drafting table and studied it a moment.

As if by magic, I saw the solution in my mind's eye. With a few strokes of eraser and pencil, I had it done. Relieved, I stood up, stretched, and looked out the window again. Three girls sat under the dogwood tree, white blouses and skirts forming a stunning composition with the blossom-covered lawn. It gave me a rush of well-being that proved to be a harbinger of what was going to happen on that extraordinary day.

"What are you doing at that window