

Nan Gaylord

By Earl Downs, in *The Oklahoma Aviator* February 2005

Nanette Gaylord is *The Oklahoma Aviator* – Aviator Of the Year Award recipient for 2004. It's hard to know where to start when describing this amazing lady. I guess the best way is to start with a basic rundown of Nan's accomplishments and then, as Paul Harvey would say; we'll get to "the rest of the story."

Nan received her Private Pilot Certificate in April 1971, in San Jose, California. She holds an Airline transport Pilot Certificate with multi-engine and single-engine land ratings; a gold seal flight instructor certificate with single/multi-engine, and instrument airplane ratings; and a ground instructor certificate with advanced and instrument ratings. She has accumulated over 9,000 hours of flight time.

Her advanced training was obtained at Ross School of Aviation, a major FAR part 141 school in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She later worked at Ross as a ground instructor, flight instructor, and finally as the general manager until 1974. In 1976, Nan founded Aviation Ground Schools, Inc. in Denver, Colorado. From 1976 through 1996 she owned and operated this company, which teaches two-day accelerated ground school courses throughout the United States. In addition, since 1989, Nan has been an FAA designated pilot examiner in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and has administered over 5,000 practical exams. She has been an active accident safety counselor in the southwest region, Oklahoma City Flight Standards District Office since 1992.

Nan first joined the Ninety-Nines, Tulsa Chapter, in 1972. She moved to Denver, and was a member of the Colorado Chapter of Ninety-Nines from 1976 through 1986, where she held all offices through Chairman. She was the International scrapbook chairman from 1982 through 1984. In 1986 Nan moved back to Tulsa, and since then has been a member of the Tulsa Chapter of the Ninety-Nines.

Fun flying has included the 1976 Powder Puff Derby, the 1977 Angel Derby, and she is the proud winner of the 1977 Powder Puff Derby commemorative flight with pilot Pat Udall (this was the last race held under the name of "Powder Puff Derby".)

Nan holds a Bachelor of Arts degree, cum laude from Kent State University in Spanish and Sociology, a Master of Science degree in aviation from OSU-Tulsa, and is a graduate of the Rhema Bible Training Center.

This is the Nan that most of us know and anyone who has ever taken a check-ride with Nan probably didn't need all these facts to come to the conclusion that this lady "knows her stuff." However, using my well-developed nose for news (peppered with a little "inside" information from some of Nan's friends), I decided to find the rest of the story. Armed with this information I sat down with Nan and searched for all that was fit to print. Here is what I got.

It would be logical to think that Nan was bottle-fed as a baby to move into aviation but that was not the case. As she entered the world of 'Making a living,' her beginnings were about as far from flying as they could get. By the mid 1960s Nan was well on her way as a professional model. From 1966 to 1970 she was the director of the John Robert Powers Modeling School and Agency in Palo Alto California. So, I asked the question, "What in the world caused you to go from making an honest living to entering the world of aviation?" Nan replied, "The man who owned the modeling school also owned a Cessna182 and asked me if I wanted to go for a ride and I did. He performed lazy eights and some stalls and that's what I thought flying was all about." I asked, "You mean he did all the things we tell pilots never to do to first time riders and you liked it?" Nan continued, "Oh, I thought it was so neat. Seeing how much I liked it he gave me the opportunity to learn how to fly. For every sale I made he paid for one hour of flying for me at the flying school at San Jose. I thought the flight training was boring at first because we didn't do a lot of wild stuff. This is how I got my private license."

This explains how Nan got started but I had to ask how she ended up in Tulsa. Her story continues, "I just got tired of California. I was too busy and didn't know what I wanted to do. I have always been a gypsy so I just packed up my car and headed out. I knew I couldn't go west from California (the Pacific Ocean is tough on cars) so I pointed east. I picked up some ski magazines along the way and had always wanted to ski. That's how I ended up in Aspen Colorado, looking for a job. I headed out job-hunting all dressed up with my resume but no one would hire me. Someone gave me the advice to just show up in jeans, without a resume and it worked. That's how I got the job working in a ski shop."

“Okay, but what has that got to do with Tulsa,” I asked. Nan replied, “A customer came in to have some equipment repaired and he had a friend with him named Joe Ross. It turns out that Joe Ross was setting up a flight school in Tulsa. He offered me a job so I took it and moved to Tulsa. I helped him run his business and he turned out to be my benefactor. He just seemed to see something special in me and put me through my commercial, instrument, flight instructor, instrument instructor and multi-engine ratings. I think it was a miracle from God. I started instructing for him and managing his school. I believed I stayed in this line of work because of what Joe did for me – I wanted to give something back.”

Nan is not only well known as a flight instructor, she is also renowned as a ground school instructor. Nan tells the story. “In 1973 I decided I wanted to come up with a better way of running an accelerated ground school. The Acme Company published the books we used in those days. I thought I could do better than Acme books. A company out of Atlanta was running weekend accelerated training programs in the Southern states and I figured I could do the same thing.”

Nan continues, “Joe Ross agreed to set up a separate company that I would run. Ross Accelerated Ground Schools was the second weekend seminar company in the country and the first to teach in all states. It started with two instructors and myself until other teams were added. We would teach the private pilot and instrument courses on the same weekend in various cities. John and Martha King were two of our instructors.”

Nan continued building the ground school until the energy crises of the mid 1970's hit hard and Joe Ross decided to shut down for a while because of a slowdown in the business. Nan continued to run the flight school. By 1975, Nan had reached “burn-out” again and the gypsy in her reappeared. She took a year off just to relax and headed for Colorado again. One year of rest seemed to do the job because she got back into the weekend training business but, this time, it was her business. She created and operated Aviation Ground Schools for 20 years until she sold the business.

After ten years in Denver, it was back to Oklahoma for Nan. How did she become an FAA designated examiner? Nan tells the story, “One day I was ramp checked by the FAA. The ramp check went fine and I asked the FAA inspector how I could get a job like his. He asked me to send a letter with information about myself, which I did. The result was that I was asked to become an FAA designated examiner. Since then, I average about 250 check-rides per year.”

Nan is now working on a book titled “Shot Down on Short Final and Other Things That Happen On a FAA Check-ride.” Nan said, “This is stories about students who either abandoned control on short final or decide to give up at 50 feet or tried to nose-dive into the ground. In other words, the student failed to kill his or her instructor and has one shot left to try for the examiner.”

Nan has flown so much that I asked what she does for fun flying. Her answer, “Aerobatics – I am very active in the Tulsa IAC Chapter 10. We meet the third Wednesday every month and I fly with whoever has a plane.

The Oklahoma Aviator recognizes Nan as the aviator Of The Year because of her tenacity and dedication to general aviation. Training is the cornerstone to the foundation of flying and Nanette Gaylord has provided the foundation upon which thousands of other pilots have built their skills, Nan, we salute you!